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SHILOH: A CASE STUDY IN SURPRISE

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fulfillment of the requirements of the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

by

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B.S., United States Military Academy, 1958

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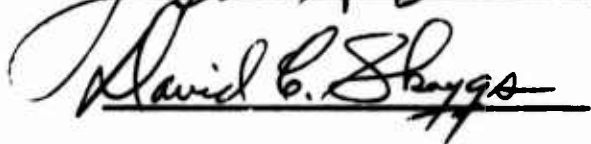
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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the individual student author and do not necessarily represent the views of either the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

The commander must remain ever vigilant against surprise, for attacks born of the unexpected have the potential to alter quickly and irreversibly the relative combat power of opposing forces. A commander is better prepared to meet this threat when he is familiar with those factors which have contributed to surprise during past conflicts. This thesis investigates the surprise phenomenon through a case study of the battle at Shiloh Church.

General Ulysses S. Grant, during the American Civil War, bivouacked his army near Shiloh Church on the Tennessee River's west bank while he awaited General Don Carlos Buell and the Army of the Ohio. On Buell's arrival the combined armies were to attack Corinth, Mississippi, where the Confederate forces under General Albert Sidney Johnston were known to be entrenched. Realizing the combined strength of the two Union armies would eventually prove overwhelming, Johnston decided to attack Grant's position before Buell could reinforce. He therefore attacked early Sunday morning, 6 April 1862. Apparently unaware that an attack was

imminent, Grant had encamped his army with little regard for defense. The Confederates enjoyed success and forced the Union army against the Tennessee River. However, Buell reinforced Grant that evening, and on the following day the Union armies counterattacked and drove the Confederates back toward Corinth. Thus, the battle ended on a rather indecisive note.

The official records, letters, books, and memoirs of Union and Confederate participants were investigated to gain an understanding of the battle. The methodology adopted was a chronological approach which examined pertinent events, circumstances, and errors relating to the battle. Through this means the investigation revealed the degree of surprise achieved by the Confederate attack and disclosed those elements which made surprise possible.

Among the more important conclusions of the thesis are:

1. Although the Union forces below division level anticipated the Confederate attack, Grant and his command echelon were completely surprised.

2. Surprise was achieved because the Union had violated several principles of war, chiefly: objective,

offensive, maneuver, unity of command, and security.

3. The Confederates were not without fault, for, had certain mistakes been avoided, their army might have won a total victory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
LIST OF FIGURES	vii

Chapter

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. SITUATION IN WESTERN THEATER PRIOR TO FORT HENRY AND FORT DONELSON	7
III. THE HENRY-DONELSON CAMPAIGN	23
IV. GRANT'S SITUATION AT PITTSBURG LANDING . . .	48
V. JOHNSTON'S DECISION TO ATTACK	68
VI. INTELLIGENCE AVAILABLE TO GRANT'S ARMY . . .	78
VII. THE BATTLE AT SHILOH CHURCH	90
VIII. CONCLUSION	110
BIBLIOGRAPHY	127

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Henry and Donelson Campaign: Situation in January 1862	10
2. Henry and Donelson Campaign: Situation About 27 February 1862	40
3. Shiloh Battlefield: Situation Through First Day, 6 April 1862	51
4. Shiloh Campaign: Confederate Advance on Shiloh	74

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout mankind's history the surprise attack has proved a bane to kings, generals, and nations alike. While in many cases armies or countries attacked have been able to withstand the initial onslaught and eventually emerge victorious, many more have fallen before the attacker in defeat. Poland's experience during the 1939 German invasion provides a recent and graphic example of the latter case.

American history is replete with examples of the surprise attack. Many have been directed against the United States, such as the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, the Battle of the Bulge, the Chinese attack across the Yalu River, and, most recently, the North Vietnamese TET offensive. We, ourselves, made use of surprise attacks during Washington's attack on Trenton, the Inchon Invasion, and the very recent attacks into Cambodia.

When a commander contemplates the disastrous consequences of being victimized by a surprise attack, he will

surely be concerned with precluding his own army's surprise in battle. Although it is extremely doubtful that any panacea exists to eliminate this danger, adherence to certain precepts will reduce the possibility of falling prey to such attacks. In addition, commanders would be wise to gain an appreciation for the combination of circumstances and errors which have made surprise possible in the past. In so doing, they may avoid those pitfalls into which others have unwittingly stumbled. The same knowledge will serve to alert them during situations when surprise is most likely. Beyond that, their own vigilance must be their shield.

The objective of this study is to explore the phenomenon of the surprise attack in an effort to discover the circumstances and errors which expose a military force to surprise attack. A comprehensive investigation of this important subject would require examination in detail of innumerable battles, but to do so exceeds the scope of this paper. Fortunately, cursory examination of many battles revealed that several factors were present, either individually or concurrently, in the historical instances in which surprise was used effectively. Some features common to most of these battles were:

1. The attacked force was in a vulnerable defensive position.

2. The force was overconfident and had neglected normal precautions.

3. The force comprised troops who had little or no combat experience.

4. The force was unwilling to accept or act upon accurate information concerning the impending attack.

5. The attacking force had executed a completely successful ruse.

6. The attacking force had suddenly assumed a completely different style of operation or had introduced new techniques and equipment.

Not all these elements were present in every surprise attack, but most surprise attacks illustrated one or more of these general characteristics.

The existence of the common features described in the preceding paragraph makes possible the technique employed in this treatise, that is, a case study of a battle in which surprise was important and in which most of these features were demonstrated. The study is intended to further understanding of the surprise attack phenomenon and to

afford an appreciation for the elements which, in the past, have made surprise possible. Understanding the elements which contributed to a successful surprise attack in an illustrative battle will enable a commander to reduce his own vulnerability to surprise in a future conflict. This same knowledge will also enable him to use surprise to good advantage during his own offensive operations. If the present investigation accomplishes these tasks successfully, then, although it adds no innovations to the art of war, it can help to improve the skills and techniques of those who practice the art. For this reason alone the study will be both relevant and profitable to the military professional.

The example selected for the case study is the battle at Shiloh Church, which occurred during the American Civil War. Many reasons figured in the selection of this particular battle. Most importantly, the battle illustrates most of the elements referred to earlier. Its study is also advantageous for other reasons. Since the battle was fought by Americans, the combatants and their records were more readily understood than would have been the case had the battle selected been fought on foreign soil. Researching the battle presented little difficulty since both opponents'

documents were plentiful. The information used is probably the most accurate which will ever be available because the participants have all died and it is doubtful that any new information will be unearthed. The battle was large enough to serve the investigation's purpose without being so vast an operation as to defy analysis. Because the study will probably be read only by Americans and because some of our nation's most famous personalities were involved, the battle will hold a natural interest for the reader. Finally, the battlefield itself was accessible for investigation.

A major drawback offsets these advantages to some extent. Because the battle of Shiloh ended on a rather indecisive note and because of the political turbulence which existed at the time, the battle became a source of great controversy not only between the opponents but also within each of their separate camps. This situation complicated the research and made comparative analysis necessary. Despite this disadvantage, an accurate description of what transpired was developed through careful examination of available records and other data.

Three specific problems required resolution. Were Union forces surprised? If so, to what degree? Finally, if

they were surprised, what particular factors made the surprise possible? The question to be answered regarding the degree of surprise is: Did the Confederates catch the Union army completely unaware or was the surprise experienced more by the Union command echelon than by the tactical units?

The three questions are answered concurrently since the battle is examined chronologically. The analysis seeks to distil the lessons learned at Shiloh and some conclusions are offered as to how future commanders might benefit from the experiences at Shiloh. The situation prior to the battle and the personalities of senior commanders are scrutinized not only to provide background but to accentuate the important part these two elements can play in making surprise possible.

CHAPTER II

SITUATION IN WESTERN THEATER PRIOR TO FORT HENRY AND FORT DONELSON

On 6 and 7 April 1862 the Confederacy pitted its men against the Union at a place called Shiloh Church in Tennessee. It was at that time the bloodiest conflict to have occurred on the American continent.¹ Other battles such as Gettysburg, Spotsylvania, Cold Harbor, Chickamauga, and the Wilderness eventually surpassed Shiloh in sanguinary work,

¹Maurice Matloff (gen. ed.), American Military History, Army Historical Series (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, United States Army, 1969), p. 215; and The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], Vol. VII (1882), Vol. VIII (1883), Vol. X, Parts 1 and 2 (1884), and Vol. LI, Part 1 (1897), Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), X, Part 1, 108 & 395, provide the following casualty figures:

<u>Item</u>	<u>Federal</u>	<u>Confederate</u>
Killed	1,754	1,723
Wounded	8,408	8,012
Total	10,162	9,735
Missing	2,885	959

but no battle had a greater impact on the people of that time.² Just as the first battle at Bull Run had served notice to the nation that the rebellion was not to be quickly subdued, the battle at Shiloh forebode the ferocity and grim carnage which was to characterize the war's future battles.

Events in the lives of men have seldom occurred in isolation. Mankind's history has inexorably intermeshed one episode with the next. To further complicate matters, man's destiny has often been determined by subtle and obscure influences. It is within this context that all history must be viewed. Hence, a mere study of the events which precipitated the battle is unlikely to yield a complete understanding of Shiloh. An investigation of the human factors which exerted an influence on the battle must form an important part of the analysis. Accordingly, the study begins with the early months of 1862.

By January 1862 the stage was set in the Union army's western theater for a series of events which were to

²Thomas L. Livermore, Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America, 1861-65 (New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1901), pp. 77-139.

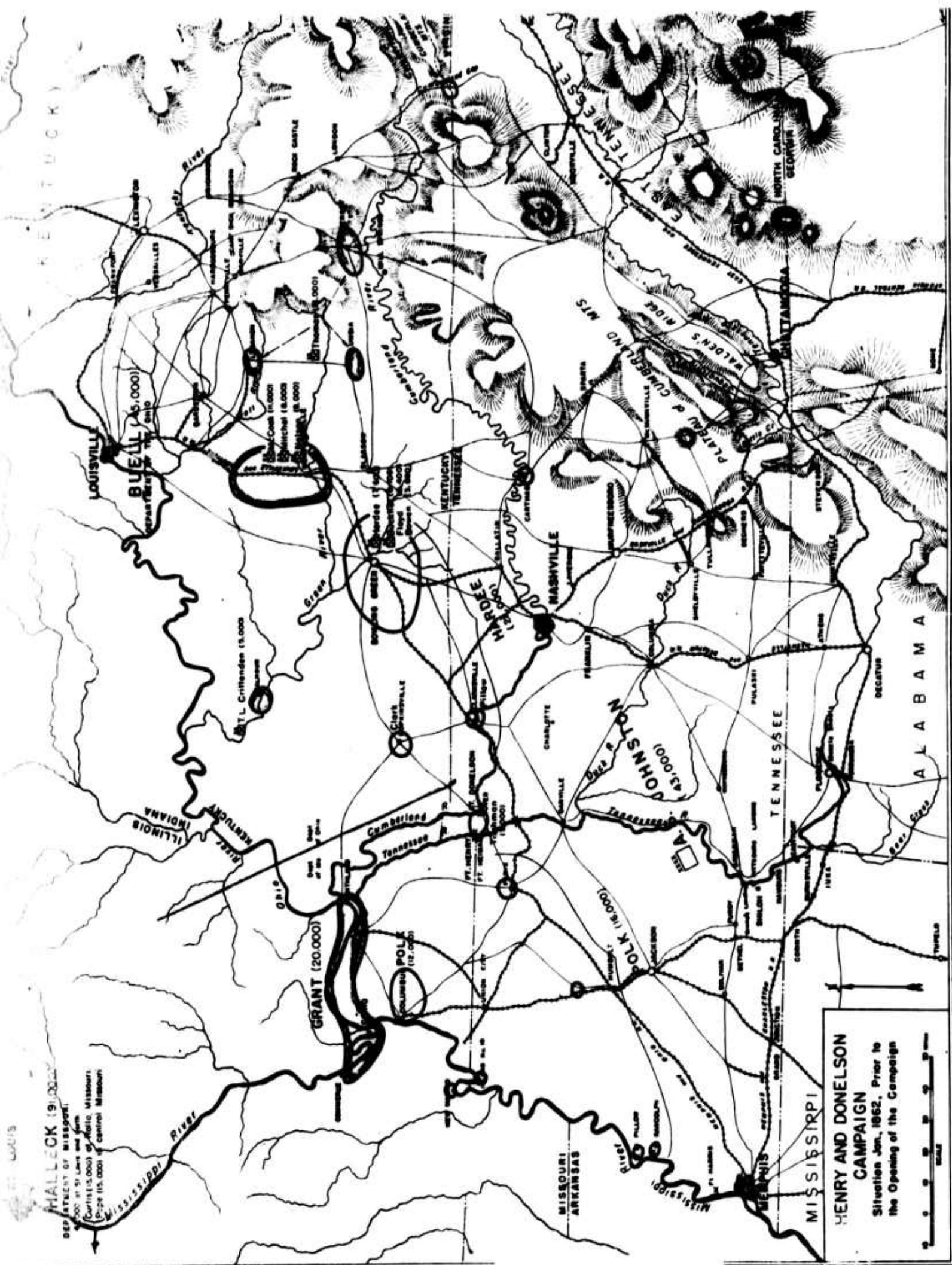
affect profoundly the entire war. The events were eventually to include such battles as Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, Corinth, Chickamauga, Vicksburg, and, of course, Shiloh. During the course of these events an obscure brigadier general, Ulysses S. Grant, was to emerge as the predominant figure and become forever a part of American history. The great significance of the western theater, however, was that events there were to culminate in sealing the Confederacy's doom.

The 43,000 Confederate troops in the western theater in January 1862 were commanded by Albert Sidney Johnston. General Johnston was responsible for an area which traversed some 500 miles from western Virginia to eastern Kansas (see Figure 1). The Confederate units were actually located east of the Mississippi River, with the main body situated along a line stretching from Bowling Green, Kentucky, west to Columbus, Kentucky.³ Because the front encompassed such a vast expanse, General Johnston was compelled to assume a defensive posture. Thus, the initiative was reluctantly passed to the Federal armies.

³Matloff, p. 210.

FIGURE 1
HENRY AND DONELSON CAMPAIGN: SITUATION
IN JANUARY 1862

Source: Matthew Forney Steele, Civil War Atlas To Accompany American Campaigns (Washington: Byron S. Adams, 1909), Plate 8.



NOT REPRODUCIBLE

The Federal armies occupied a line generally along the Ohio River. The theater had been divided into two departments. Brigadier General Don Carlos Buell, whose headquarters was located at Louisville, Kentucky, commanded approximately 45,000 troops in the Department of Ohio, while Major General Henry W. Halleck, located at St. Louis, Missouri, commanded some 91,000 men in the Department of Missouri. The dividing line between the two departments was the Cumberland River. That part of Kentucky lying west of the river was the responsibility of the Department of Missouri. The remainder of Kentucky fell under the Department of Ohio.⁴ (See Figure 1.)

The backgrounds of Generals Halleck and Buell provide a necessary insight into relationships among the Federal commanders and assist in understanding events which were to culminate in the battle at Shiloh.

Major General Henry W. Halleck was graduated from the United States Military Academy on 1 July 1839, third in a class of 32 cadets. Commissioned a Second Lieutenant of Engineers, he remained at West Point one year as an

⁴Matloff, p. 210; and OR, VIII, 369.

assistant professor of Civil and Military Engineering.⁵ In 1841, while working on fortifications in New York City, he wrote a paper on coastal defense which was published by the United States Senate. This paper attracted the attention of the Lowell Institute in Boston, and the Institute invited Halleck to deliver a series of 12 lectures on the science of war. The lectures were so well received in Boston that Halleck published their content under the title Elements of Military Art and Science. The book became eminently popular among military students and was later issued by the Army as a manual for volunteer officers. When the war with Mexico began, Halleck was assigned to California. During the 7-month passage around Cape Horn, he translated from the French Baron Jomini's Life of Napoleon. This translation was published in 1864. Upon his arrival, Lieutenant Halleck became prominently involved in the establishment of a civil government for conquered California. As a consequence of his demonstrated ability he was promoted to Captain of Engineers on 1 July 1853, a rank he held until he resigned

⁵"June 1839 [1st Class]" and "June 1841" in Register, U. S. M. A., 1838-54 [hereinafter cited as Register] (New York: W. L. Burroughs, Printer, [1854]).

from military service on 1 August 1854. In 1855 he married Alexander Hamilton's granddaughter and became a resident of California. He founded a law firm which quickly grew into one of the most successful in California, became part owner of the second richest mercury mine in the world, and served as president of a California railroad. In 1860 the California citizens honored him with the rank of major general in the militia. In the meantime, he had also published two more books, one of which dealt with international law and was used as a college textbook. By the time the southern states seceded from the Union, Henry W. Halleck had become a distinguished and prosperous California citizen.⁶

Winfield Scott, the aging General in Chief of the Federal Armies, was well aware of Halleck's abilities. In a letter dated 4 October 1861 to the Secretary of War, Scott expressed disenchantment with General McClellan. At that time McClellan was considered the most likely person to succeed Scott. Scott concluded the letter by saying that he

⁶ Stephen E. Ambrose, Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), pp. 7-8; and George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1891), I, 734-35.

personally felt Halleck, rather than McClellan, should be given the appointment. Although Scott suffered the maladies of age, he apparently was delaying his retirement until Halleck's arrival from California.⁷ On 10 October 1861 Halleck, accompanied by his family, sailed for the east coast, leaving behind his home, his friends, and his practice. The Federal embarrassment suffered at Bull Run and the exigency of the Union situation induced powerful members of Congress to demand the Army's immediate reorganization, with McClellan as the new commander. So it was that on 1 November 1861, before Halleck's arrival, President Lincoln appointed McClellan General in Chief. Frustrated and physically exhausted, Winfield Scott went into retirement. After his arrival in Washington, D. C., General Halleck was sent west to command the Department of Missouri. He was to command that department successfully from 18 November 1861 to 11 July 1862, when he was once again summoned to Washington. At that time he assumed the position he had been too late to accept in 1861, General in Chief of all the land armies.⁸

⁷OR, LI, Part 1, 491-93.

⁸Cullum, II, 253 & 738.

Don Carlos Buell was graduated from West Point on 1 July 1841, two years behind Halleck. Buell's academic record was unimpressive, thirty-second in a class of 52 cadets.⁹ During the Mexican War he established an outstanding combat record, receiving brevet promotion to captain for meritorious and gallant conduct during the battle of Monterey in 1846. During the battle of Churubusco in August 1847, Buell was severely wounded; however, not before he first displayed exceptional valor and earned a promotion to brevet major. Following the Mexican War he served as an adjutant general in various military departments from coast to coast. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was a lieutenant colonel assigned to Headquarters, Department of the Pacific, San Francisco. He was immediately promoted to brigadier general in the United States Volunteers and assigned to the Washington, D. C., defenses. On 15 November 1861 he assumed command of the Department of the Ohio.¹⁰

Affairs in the west were utterly confused during the early months of 1862. Generals Halleck and Buell were

⁹"June 1841 [1st Class]" in Register.

¹⁰Cullum, II, 95.

reporting directly to Washington since neither had authority over the other. On the other hand, they faced a Confederate force which was unified under a single commander. To make matters worse, the Confederate force lay partially within both the Department of Missouri and the Department of Ohio, a problem which might have proved less perplexing had the two commanders been willing to act in consonance. Unfortunately, neither general was so disposed, a fact which was soon made painfully clear to President Lincoln. Lincoln was extremely anxious to begin operations oriented toward eastern Tennessee, particularly the region surrounding Knoxville, an area populated by staunch Union supporters. The President believed significant results might be achieved if the Government demonstrated an early ability to protect those citizens who remained loyal to the Union.¹¹ Although his motives were politically inspired, certain military advantages would have attended such an operation.

General McClellan quickly supported Lincoln's plan

¹¹Colin R. Ballard, The Military Genius of Abraham Lincoln (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1952), p. 177; and Matthew Forney Steele, Civil War Atlas To Accompany American Campaigns (Washington: Byron S. Adams, 1909), p. 3.

since any successes in eastern Tennessee undoubtedly would have compelled the Confederacy to react by sending reinforcements from Virginia. Such a move on the part of the Confederates would have materially assisted McClellan's own advance toward Richmond.¹² In a letter dated 17 November 1861, McClellan urged Buell to advance into eastern Tennessee and secure Knoxville. Buell appears to have been aware of the strategic considerations which prompted this proposal,¹³ but he was also keenly aware that the plan overlooked some enormous problems. Such a move would have left the large Confederate force at Bowling Green unopposed. Had Buell withdrawn to the east, this force might have followed, disrupting, if not actually severing, his strained line of communications. Any serious interruption of this line would have led to a precarious dependence on the countryside for food and supplies. Moreover, the forced requisitioning of goods from the population might well have antagonized the very loyalists whom Lincoln hoped to assuage. Buell also

¹²Carl Sandburg, Abraham Lincoln: The War Years (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1937), I, 421; and T. Harry Williams, Lincoln and His Generals (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), pp. 3 & 47-48.

¹³OR, VII, 447, 450, & 487.

discerned that the farther he marched into Tennessee, the farther he would be from Halleck's army. Thus, the Federal armies could become subject to defeat in detail. In Buell's mind the defeat of Johnston's army was clearly a requisite to an invasion of Tennessee. He conveyed this thought to McClellan in the form of an alternate plan.

Buell's plan called for a simultaneous advance, with Halleck attacking south along the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers while he, himself, moved against Nashville. The advantages of this course of action were indeed impressive. The full might of the two western armies would be brought to bear against the Confederate force. The two armies would be advancing against the most critical portion of the Confederate States--the Tennessee and Mississippi Rivers. Provided the operation was successful, all east-west communications north of Memphis and Chattanooga would be lost to the Confederacy; the main east-west railroad between those two cities would be in jeopardy; Nashville, Tennessee's capital, would fall; the Confederate units in east Tennessee would be outflanked; and, finally, the Confederacy would be faced with the prospect of losing her western states. It is important to understand this situation because, following

the capture of Fort Donelson, this was precisely the dilemma that faced the Confederacy.¹⁴

On 20 January Halleck wrote McClellan a letter in which he introduced yet another plan. This plan was similar to Buell's; however, Halleck estimated he would require 60,000 men to advance southward along the Cumberland and Tennessee Rivers. He proposed obtaining the additional troops from Buell's command while Buell remained behind a defensive position along the Green River. In one important sense the proposal is indispensable to this study, for it reveals a major facet of Halleck's personality. He suggested a plan which, if adopted, would have ultimately led to his controlling the bulk of Buell's army. Clearly, Halleck had designs on the adjacent command and was making little effort to conceal them.¹⁵

¹⁴Buell's rationale in John Codman Ropes, The Story of the Civil War (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1894), I, 197-208; his theories substantiated in Ballard, pp. 177-78, and Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, ed. E. B. Long (New York: World Publishing Company, 1952), pp. 145-46 & 163; McClellan/Buell correspondence in OR, VII, 450-51, 487, 520, & 931-32; and importance the Confederacy attached to area Buell proposed to attack in Stanley F. Horn, The Army of Tennessee (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1941), pp. 74-79, and OR, VII, 889.

¹⁵OR, VIII, 508-11.

Buell, McClellan, and President Lincoln exchanged several messages regarding the matter. All correspondence reflected the President's and McClellan's continued advocacy of an advance into eastern Tennessee. While the various plans were being debated, General McClellan fell ill and President Lincoln took the opportunity to wire Generals Halleck and Buell personally. The wires suggested that the two commanders act in concert during future operations and inquired as to what coordination had already taken place. Buell's reply doubtless surprised the President, for it read, in part: "There is no arrangement between General Halleck and myself." If General Buell's reply surprised the President, he surely must have been nonplussed on reading Halleck's:

. . . I have never received a word from General Buell. I am not ready to co-operate with him. Hope to do so in a few weeks. Have written fully on this subject to Major-General McClellan. Too much haste will ruin everything.

It is evident the two officers were acting independently and Halleck was preoccupied with readying his own command for war. The true extent of Halleck's preoccupation with his

¹⁶OR, VII, 450, 457-58, 477, 487, 520, 524, 526, 530-31, & 927.

command becomes more apparent in Chapter III.

On 6 January 1862 Halleck sent a letter to President Lincoln in which he announced he could commit only 10,000 to a southward movement. He concluded by recommending against any advance at that time. On 10 January the President indorsed Halleck's letter with this note: "The within is a copy of a letter just received from General Halleck. It is exceedingly discouraging. As everywhere else, nothing can be done."¹⁷ Evidently the President was becoming exasperated by the military's inactivity. At any rate, the situation in the west had fallen under a cloud of indecision and was merely awaiting a catalyst to cause activity. That chemical ingredient appeared in the form of Brigadier General Ulysses S. Grant.

¹⁷OR, VII, 532-33.

CHAPTER III

THE HENRY-DONELSON CAMPAIGN

Ulysses Simpson Grant graduated from West Point in 1843, twenty-first in a class of 39 cadets.¹ He was described in the academy records as neither studious nor attentive to the discipline of the institution. However, his class standing in three courses was noteworthy--tenth in mathematics, fifteenth in philosophy, and sixteenth in engineering. On graduation he was assigned to the Texas frontier as a Second Lieutenant of Infantry, and during the war with Mexico he twice received brevet promotions for gallant and meritorious service. As a matter of interest, the promotions came only five days apart for two different actions. Following the war he spent assignments as quartermaster at Sackett's Harbor, New York, and at Detroit, Michigan. Between 1852 and 1854 Grant was assigned to frontier duty in Oregon and California. During the latter

¹"June 1843 [1st Class]" in Register, U. S. M. A., 1838-54 (New York: W. L. Burroughs, Printer, [1854]).

assignment, on 31 July 1854, he submitted his resignation,² citing extreme homesickness as the principal motive.³ At that time his wife and two children lived in Missouri and he had not seen them for two years. He might have asked his family to join him in California, but he concluded that a captain's pay was inadequate to support a family on the Pacific coast. So it was that in 1854 the family was reunited on his wife's farm near St. Louis.

Grant farmed this land until 1859, when ill health forced him to give it up. Consequently, in 1859 he embarked on a venture with his wife's cousin and established a real estate agency in St. Louis. This enterprise proved only modestly successful and it became woefully obvious that two families were unable to subsist on the profits. Thus, one year after its formation the partnership was dissolved.

²George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1891), II, 171 & 173.

³There is evidence that excessive drinking during this period caused Grant disciplinary problems. However, since it is not essential to this investigation, his stated reason for leaving the service is accepted herein; see Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, ed. E. B. Long (New York: World Publishing Company, 1952), p. 105.

Grant and his family then moved to Galena, Illinois, where he became a clerk in his father's store. When the Civil War broke out, Grant led a company of volunteers to the state capital at Springfield, where he remained at the governor's request to assist in organizing the ungainly mass of volunteers which seemed to swarm into the city. Due chiefly to this work he was promoted on 17 June 1861 to colonel in the 21st Illinois Volunteers. Two months later, through the efforts of the Illinois delegation in Congress, he was appointed brigadier general in the United States Volunteers.⁴ On 4 September 1861 Grant arrived at his new headquarters in Cairo, Illinois, and assumed command of the District of Southeast Missouri, a part of the Department of Missouri, which General Halleck was to command in two months.⁵

When the battle at Shiloh is viewed in retrospect, an influence of special interest appears to have been the

⁴Cullum, II, 173; and Grant, pp. 129-30. Grant's commission was actually issued on 7 August 1861, but it was made retroactive to 17 May. His was the first name mentioned when President Lincoln asked the Illinois Congressmen to name seven officers for promotion to brigadier general.

⁵Grant, pp. 105-107 & 117-35.

personal relationship between Halleck and Grant. The full particulars regarding their association and the related consequences are revealed as the investigation progresses. At this juncture, however, a brief discussion of their personalities is appropriate.

It is impossible to discern precisely the personalities of men who are separated from us by nearly 100 years. Nevertheless, certain clues have been provided by their contemporaries. The danger exists that these contemporary viewpoints may reflect individual prejudices rather than objective facts. Consequently, the descriptions that follow were chosen from those available because they seem to have been the consensus opinion.

Charles A. Dana, Assistant Secretary of War from 1863 to 1865, left the following remarkably intimate portrait of General Grant:

Grant was an uncommon fellow--the most modest, the most disinterested, and the most honest man I ever knew, with a temper that nothing could disturb, and a judgment that was judicial in its comprehensiveness and wisdom. Not a great man, except morally; not an original or brilliant man, but sincere, thoughtful, deep, and gifted with courage that never faltered; when the time came to risk all, he went in like a simple-hearted, unaffected, unpretending hero, whom no ill omens could deject and no triumph unduly exalt. A social, friendly man, too, fond of a pleasant joke and also ready with one; but liking above all a long chat of an evening, and ready to sit up

with you all night, talking in the cool breeze in front of his tent. Not a man of sentimentality, not demonstrative in friendship, but always holding to his friends, and just even to the enemies he hated.⁶

General Lew Wallace, who served under Grant in the western theater, noted that Grant smoked cigars incessantly through a short, reddish beard. He further observed that the general's coat was off-color and "the worse for tarnished buttons." Wallace concluded his description with an opinion universally expressed by others: "There was nothing about him suggestive of greatness, nothing heroic."⁷

Another officer carried the same thought even further when he remarked that Grant's appearance was disappointingly simple and unmilitary.⁸

Standing about 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighing approximately 190 pounds, with a large bald spot and a definite double chin,⁹ Halleck, like Grant, evidently did

⁶Charles A. Dana, Recollections of the Civil War (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), pp. 61-62.

⁷Lew Wallace, An Autobiography (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1906), I, 352.

⁸James Harrison Wilson, Under the Old Flag (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), p. 138.

⁹Stephen E. Ambrose, Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,

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with you all night, talking in the cool breeze in front of his tent. Not a man of sentimentality, not demonstrative in friendship, but always holding to his friends, and just even to the enemies he hated.⁶

General Lew Wallace, who served under Grant in the western theater, noted that Grant smoked cigars incessantly through a short, reddish beard. He further observed that the general's coat was off-color and "the worse for tarnished buttons." Wallace concluded his description with an opinion universally expressed by others: "There was nothing about him suggestive of greatness, nothing heroic."⁷

Another officer carried the same thought even further when he remarked that Grant's appearance was disappointingly simple and unmilitary.⁸

Standing about 5 feet 9 inches tall and weighing approximately 190 pounds, with a large bald spot and a definite double chin,⁹ Halleck, like Grant, evidently did

⁶Charles A. Dana, Recollections of the Civil War (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1898), pp. 61-62.

⁷Lew Wallace, An Autobiography (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1906), I, 352.

⁸James Harrison Wilson, Under the Old Flag (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912), p. 138.

⁹Stephen E. Ambrose, Halleck: Lincoln's Chief of Staff (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press,

not look the part of a dashing leader. General James Harrison Wilson, who later became a member of Grant's staff, remembered General Halleck in this way:

I had read Halleck's "Art of War," and was ready to believe him not only a learned man, but a mighty captain. Great victories had been gained and great disasters had been averted in his western command. Belmont, Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, Shiloh and Corinth had been won, and while Grant was popularly regarded as the principal figure, Halleck was his titular chief, and in common with many others I was disposed to give him a great part of credit. He had already received the sobriquet of "old Brains," but when I beheld his bulging eyes, his flabby cheeks, his slack-twisted figure, and his slow and deliberate movements, and noted his sluggish speech, lacking in point and magnetism, I experienced a distinct feeling of disappointment which from that day never grew less.¹⁰

General Wallace was no more charitable. He found Halleck positive in speech almost to the point of being boastful and reported two mannerisms which must have been pronounced since many other writers noted them: a peculiar sideways carriage of the head and "a habit of looking at people with eyes wide open, staring, dull, fishy even, more than owlsh."¹¹ Halleck was generally described as a pedant who was averse to any risk. Yet, all reports hastened to

1962), p. 9.

¹⁰Wilson, pp. 98-99.

¹¹Wallace, I, 570-71.

mention his remarkable administrative and organizational abilities. Dana wrote:

Halleck was not thought to be a great man in the field, but he was nevertheless a man of military ability, and by reason of his great accomplishments in the technics [sic] of armies and of war was almost invaluable as an adviser to the civilians Lincoln and Stanton. He was an honest man, perhaps somewhat lacking in moral courage, yet earnest and energetic in his efforts to sustain the national government.¹²

Halleck appears to have been a rather unemotional man, one not given to close friendships. He was evidently a man who neither inspired nor actively sought love and confidence. His friendship with General William Tecumseh Sherman was the exception to this rule. Although this long-standing friendship was severely tested during the war years, it seems to have survived, for when Sherman wrote his memoirs in 1875 he devoted some praise to General Halleck.¹³

It should be apparent that Generals Grant and Halleck were strikingly dissimilar men. Halleck was a successful, learned man who had been placed in a position of great

¹²Dana, p. 187.

¹³William T. Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman, 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton, 1875). Grant, McClellan, Wallace, and Secretary Stanton either ignored or highly criticized Halleck when they wrote their memoirs. For this reason, Sherman's memoirs are unique.

responsibility. Subsequent discussion in this chapter shows he was also a man who jealously guarded that position. He was a man given to pedantry and unlikely to be swayed, a man who manifested an air of unfriendliness and detachment. Moreover, Halleck was a commander who could not accept risk. Grant was so different from this that from the outset one would suspect them to find each other unfathomable. Such was the case.

Halleck, having submitted his plan to McClellan on 20 January, sought to gain more information regarding the defenses at Fort Henry while awaiting McClellan's reply. On 22 January he gave General Grant permission to visit him at St. Louis.¹⁴ Grant, long since convinced Fort Henry could be taken and thus pave the way for an advance up the Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers, had repeatedly requested a meeting. He, as did Halleck and Buell, appreciated that success in this direction would force the Confederate army from

¹⁴The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], Vol. VII (1882), Vol. VIII (1883), Vol. X, Parts 1 and 2 (1884), and Vol. LI, Part 1 (1897), Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), VII, 561.

Kentucky, so he was eager, therefore, to discuss his campaign plan with General Halleck. The results of this meeting are best expressed in Grant's own words:

I had known General Halleck but very slightly in the old army, not having met him either at West Point or during the Mexican War. I was received with so little cordiality that I perhaps stated the object of my visit with less clearness than I might have done, and I had not uttered many sentences before I was cut short as if my plan was preposterous. I returned to Cairo very much crestfallen.¹⁵

This is the first instance that would lead one to believe Halleck viewed Grant with some lack of respect, if not outright disdain. Following the meeting, Grant continually sought authority to attack Fort Henry. In a message to Halleck on 28 January he stated he could, if given permission, take Fort Henry. On the same day, Flag Officer Foote sent a like message in which he added the Navy's weight to Grant's proposal. Doubtless this was more than coincidence since Foote was collocated with Grant at Cairo. The next day Grant sent still another message in which he briefly reviewed the advantages of seizing and holding Fort Henry. Finally, on 30 January Halleck ordered Grant to take Fort Henry.¹⁶

¹⁵Grant, p. 147.

¹⁶OR, VII, 120-22.

It is impossible to determine precisely what prompted General Halleck to order the advance of some 10,000 men when he had estimated earlier that a successful operation would require 60,000. He may have been partially influenced by the optimism of his subordinates; however, it seems an erroneous report from Washington supplied the primary impetus. Halleck had received a telegram which warned that General Beauregard had left Manassas, Virginia, with 15 Confederate regiments and was moving to reinforce the Columbus-Bowling Green line. Had this been true, some sort of immediate response was necessary or the opportunity to seize Fort Henry would have been lost.¹⁷

Rationale notwithstanding, General Grant attacked. By 6 February he and Foote had taken Fort Henry. In the same message in which Grant notified Halleck that Fort Henry had fallen, he also announced that he was moving on Fort Donelson. However, Grant was overly optimistic when he predicted he would destroy Donelson by 8 February, for he did not capture that fort until 16 February. Even as early as this Grant exhibited ominous signs of underrating his

¹⁷OR, VII, 122 & 571.

opponent's willingness to fight.¹⁸ These two Union victories, following one another so closely, excited confidence in the North. Grant became the hero of the hour. His terms for unconditional surrender at Fort Donelson had captured the people's imagination. However, within an amazingly short time Grant's own future was to be threatened.

Some glimpses into General Halleck's personality may be gained from his actions during this period. To begin with, he had not informed Buell of the decision to advance against Fort Henry. Once again Halleck was demonstrating a blind obsession for only those things immediately related to his command. It must also be concluded that he wished to reserve for his department any success which might be gained from the operation. Properly enough, Buell complained to General McClellan: "I protest against such prompt proceedings, as though I had nothing to do but command 'Commence firing' when he [Halleck] starts off."¹⁹

During the period between the fall of Fort Henry and

¹⁸OR, VII, 124. Although not written in orders to Grant, it must be assumed that Halleck also ordered Grant to take Fort Donelson (see OR, VII, 574).

¹⁹OR, VII, 933.

Fort Donelson, Halleck became increasingly fearful of failure. At times he was convinced Grant would be cut off and destroyed, and he likewise feared major counterattacks by the Confederates. In reality, the southern army had withdrawn from Bowling Green to Nashville after Fort Henry fell, and, while Fort Donelson was still under siege, the Confederates were planning the evacuation of Nashville. Halleck desperately attempted to obtain reinforcements from Buell. Buell did send some troops to Grant, but Halleck wanted more. He even attempted to lure Buell by offering him command of the Fort Donelson expedition, obviously assuming Buell would bring a portion of his army with him. Halleck's final offer went so far as to promise that Generals Grant and Sherman would be transferred if Buell would only accept the command. General Buell refused the bribe. Once more Halleck's designs on Buell's command were evident.²⁰ By surreptitiously offering Buell command of the expedition, Halleck exhibited shocking disloyalty toward his subordinate and evidenced yet another indication that he held Grant in low esteem.

²⁰OR, VII, 592, 599-600, 604-605, 607, 609, 616-22, & 624-25.

Halleck's actions displayed a lack of conviction and moral courage. Had he informed Buell of the impending attack, Buell could have placed his army in a better position to assist Grant, thereby eliminating any fear of a Confederate counterattack. Furthermore, the Confederates had no intention of attacking. Any threat to Grant existed only in Halleck's mind.

Halleck had wanted Buell under his command from the beginning of the campaign (see page 20). With the fall of Fort Donelson, he became more insistent. On the day following the victory he wrote General McClellan: "Make Buell, Grant, and Pope major-generals of volunteers, and give me command in the West. I ask this in return for Forts Henry and Donelson."²¹ Two days later he again wrote McClellan, saying: "This decision, if sustained, makes everything right for the Western Division. Give it to me, and I will split secession in twain in one month."²² On the following day he wrote McClellan again: "I must have command of the armies of the West."²³ The Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, replied that the President was satisfied with the existing

²¹OR, VII, 628. ²²OR, VII, 636. ²³OR, VII, 641.

command relationships. He further admonished Halleck to "co-operate fully and zealously" with Buell.²⁴ It had become apparent as far away as Washington that Halleck's ambition was precluding adequate coordination between the western armies.

Another interesting aspect of these two victories is that Halleck neglected to recognize Grant. Halleck's message to Washington asked for Buell's and Pope's promotions along with Grant's. These two officers were only remotely associated with the victories. Grant mentioned in his memoirs that the only other recognition he received from Halleck was a formal order published in St. Louis thanking Foote, Grant, and the entire command.²⁵ On the other hand, Halleck devoted an entire message to Washington regarding Brigadier General Charles F. Smith, one of Grant's division commanders. He not only asked for Smith's promotion, but he seemed to imply that Smith was responsible for the success at Fort Donelson.²⁶ One wonders if, following the victory

²⁴OR, VII, 652.

²⁵Grant, p. 162.

²⁶"Brig. Gen. Charles F. Smith, by his coolness and bravery at Fort Donelson when the battle was against us, turned the tide and carried the enemy's outworks. Make him a major-general. You can't get a better one. Honor him for

at Fort Donelson, Halleck's disdain for Grant was not also tinged by jealousy. Although Generals Pope and Buell were not promoted, General Smith did receive his promotion on 21 March. Grant had already been promoted a month earlier. So, the man who had left his job as store clerk some 11 months earlier to lead a company of volunteers to the Illinois state capital was then junior only to General Halleck himself.

On 16 February McClellan ordered Halleck to move against Nashville with Grant's force. Halleck, on the contrary, ordered Grant to remain at Donelson and directed Foote to return all gunboats but one to Cairo. Both Grant and Foote were anxious to move on Nashville, and Foote was astonished by the order. It appears these orders were prompted by Halleck's incessant fear of a Confederate counterattack.²⁷

There is another, more insidious, explanation for Halleck's actions. He may have been motivated by jealousy. In ordering Grant's force toward Nashville, Halleck would

this victory and the whole country will applaud [OR, VII, 637]."

²⁷OR, VII, 625, 627-28, 633, 648, & 655.

have been sending the command into Buell's department.

Although only a temporary arrangement, it could have developed into something more permanent, with Washington expecting Buell to produce results.²⁸

Immediately following the fall of Fort Donelson, Grant was assigned to command the new Military District of West Tennessee, a district with undefined limits. Acting on his own initiative, Grant sent one of his divisions to occupy Clarksville. Additionally, reinforcements which had been sent from Buell too late for the battle at Donelson were directed by way of Clarksville to Nashville. Grant correctly concluded that these dispositions would assist Buell's subsequent occupation of Nashville. Moreover, on 27 February, after notifying Halleck's headquarters, Grant himself went to Nashville to coordinate personally with Buell.²⁹ At first glance these events may appear to have been of minor consequence. However, in the light of what has already been discussed, it is not surprising that they were soon magnified to tremendous importance. The results

²⁸ John Codman Ropes, The Story of the Civil War (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1894), II, 50.

²⁹ OR, VII, 629, 637-38, 649, 662, & 666.

were to have a lasting impact on Grant, thus affecting in some measure his state of mind just prior to the battle of Shiloh Church.

On 1 March Halleck directed Grant to move his entire column up the Tennessee River (south). The operation might best be described as a reconnaissance in force, with Grant instructed to avoid a general engagement. After destroying rail lines and bridges at Eastport, Corinth, Jackson, and Humboldt, Grant was to return to Paris and Danville (see Figure 2). The move was evidently intended to impede the juncture of Generals Beauregard and Johnston.³⁰ On 3 March Halleck sent a message to McClellan stating, in part:

I have had no communications with General Grant for more than a week. He left his command without my authority and went to Nashville. His army seems to be as much demoralized by the victory of Fort Donelson as was that of the Potomac by the defeat of Bull Run. It is hard to censure a successful general immediately after a victory, but I think he richly deserves it. I can get no returns, no reports, no information of any kind from him. Satisfied with his victory, he sits down and enjoys it without any regard to the future. I am worn-out and tired with his neglect and inefficiency. C. F. Smith is almost the only officer equal to the emergency.³¹

Wasting no time, McClellan replied on the same day

³⁰OR, VII, 674.

³¹OR, VII, 679-80.

FIGURE 2

HENRY AND DONELSON CAMPAIGN: SITUATION

ABOUT 27 FEBRUARY 1862

Source: Matthew Forney Steele, Civil War Atlas To Accompany American Campaigns (Washington: Byron S. Adams, 1909), Plate 13.

in a message which was sympathetic to Halleck's request. He stated that Halleck was free to arrest Grant and to place Smith in command. He further implied that these proceedings could be regarded as an order if Halleck felt they would "smooth the way."³² Accordingly, on 4 March Grant received the following message from Halleck:

You will place Maj. Gen. C. F. Smith in command of expedition, and remain yourself at Fort Henry. Why do you not obey my orders to report strength and positions of your command?³³

On that same day Halleck sent McClellan a message saying a rumor had just reached him that Grant had resumed his former "bad habits." He also informed McClellan that he had placed Smith in command of the expedition but had not yet arrested Grant.³⁴

On 5 March Grant informed Halleck that the enemy was in strength at Eastport and that in compliance with instructions Smith had been placed in command. He defended himself by saying he had been reporting almost daily to Halleck's headquarters and he had informed that headquarters of his intended trip to Nashville.³⁵

³²OR, VII, 680.

³³OR, X, Part 2, 3.

³⁴OR, VII, 682.

³⁵OR, X, Part 2, 4-5.

Grant's instructions to Smith are very revealing. He informed Smith that the enemy was reportedly 20,000 strong in the area of Eastport and Corinth, Mississippi, with sufficient rolling stock to concentrate at either point on short order. He confessed he hardly knew what course to recommend inasmuch as his instructions were that a general engagement was to be avoided yet the bridges were to be destroyed, if possible. Grant's interpretation was that a defeat was to be avoided and, rather than risk one, it would be better to retreat. He concluded by promising every support and offering his congratulations on a richly deserved promotion.³⁶ Obviously, Grant considered Halleck's orders somewhat vague and purposeless.

Grant received two messages from Halleck on 6 March. The first further censured Grant for the trip to Nashville and the second alluded to Washington's having given Halleck permission to place Grant under arrest. These messages were apparently more than Grant could endure. In his reply he once again defended his actions and concluded by stating his belief that there were personal enemies between Halleck and

³⁶OR, X, Part 2, 6.

himself. Accordingly, he expressed a desire to be relieved from further duty in Halleck's department.³⁷

The exchanges between Halleck and Grant continued through 11 March, with Grant becoming more insistent in his demands for immediate release from the department. Meanwhile, on 10 March, by direction of President Lincoln, Halleck was told to submit specific formal complaints against Grant. Apparently Lincoln had no desire to lose a victorious commander by reason of obscure insinuations. This request seemed to dampen Halleck's ardor, because he informed Washington that Grant had made proper explanations and that the visit to Nashville was prompted by "a praiseworthy, although mistaken, zeal for the public service." In addition, he ordered Grant to resume command of the expedition and to lead it on to new victories.³⁸

One of the most troublesome aspects of this sad affair was Halleck's motive. It may well have been

³⁷OR, X, Part 2, 15.

³⁸OR, VII, 683-84; and OR, X, Part 2, 20-22, 27, 29-30, 32, & 36. According to Grant, p. 167, the situation involving the exchange of reports may have been caused by a Confederate spy who was a telegraph operator on the line between Grant and Halleck.

impatience since, at the same time, Halleck himself was under pressure from Washington to report troop strengths. McClellan had made the disconcerting observation that Halleck wanted command of the entire west, yet he, Halleck, was unaware of the troop strength in his own department.³⁹

Jealousy, however, cannot be ruled out as a motive. At that time Halleck's bid for command of the entire west had been denied. Grant was quickly developing into one of the most famous generals in the Union Army. Furthermore, had not Grant taken it upon himself to deal directly with the adjacent department commander? Was this not a breach of command channels? Upon whose authority did Grant dispatch divisions from one department to another? Who did this insignificant general think he was? Doubtless similar considerations must have prompted Halleck's actions. That Halleck was finally given command of the entire western theater on 11 March is also interesting. One wonders whether it was mere coincidence that on 15 March he sent a message to Washington exonerating Grant. Was Grant's reinstatement in command due to Halleck's at last having secured the elusive command of

³⁹OR, VII, 645-47 & 650; and OR, X, Part 2, 20-22.

the west? Certainly the promotion placed Halleck in a position where he could afford to be less fearful of his subordinates and more generous toward them.⁴⁰

Investigation of this episode is certainly not intended to disparage General Halleck. The examination was conducted because of its importance to General Grant and his subsequent actions at Shiloh less than one month later. Additionally, Halleck's opinion of Grant must be thoroughly understood, for indeed Grant would have been terribly imperceptive had he not been aware of Halleck's hostility. More importantly, Grant would have been an extremely callous man were he not upset and embarrassed by what had transpired. Grant's life until the Civil War seemed dogged by failure. His resignation from the Army was a disconcerting experience and his subsequent failures in civil life must have caused further disappointment. With the onset of the war, Grant's fortunes suddenly took a spectacular turn for the better. Within a year he had risen to the rank of major general and had led a large force in two successive victories, the only major victories the Union could claim. Yet, in less than

⁴⁰OR, X, Part 2, 28-29.

three weeks following these victories, he found himself severely criticized, virtually without command, and threatened with arrest. It is interesting to contemplate the impact these events must have had on Grant and his subsequent actions at Shiloh. But, contemplation must suffice, for exhaustive investigation has disclosed no reliable evidence concerning Grant's mental state. He must surely have been deeply troubled as he departed to rejoin his command at Savannah, Tennessee. Upon arrival there on 17 March, he sent a dispatch to General Sherman in which he stated: "Although sick for the last two weeks, I already feel better at the thought of being along with the troops."⁴¹ The illness was not described, but his problems with Halleck were undoubtedly involved.

⁴¹OR, X, Part 2, 43.

CHAPTER IV

GRANT'S SITUATION AT PITTSBURG LANDING

General C. F. Smith led Grant's army south while Grant remained at Fort Henry awaiting resolution of his problem with Halleck. During this period Sherman acted as one of Smith's division commanders. Smith had established his headquarters in Savannah, Tennessee, while a portion of the army under Sherman attempted to destroy railroad lines in Eastport and Chickasaw. Smith would have accompanied this force, but he was critically ill, having cut his leg while stepping into a boat. The abrasion became infected and eventually caused his untimely death on 25 April 1862. Shortly after the beginning of Sherman's operation, torrential rains swelled normally insignificant streams into raging rapids and the lowlands along the Tennessee River became a virtual quagmire. Sherman was forced to embark his men and seek high ground from which subsequent operations could be launched. Thus it was that on 16 March Sherman selected Pittsburg Landing as the place to disembark. The

area was high above the Tennessee River and well suited for launching operations toward Corinth. Additionally, the area provided adequate space for a large force and was naturally strong. Smith had concurred with Sherman's selection, and the army began to assemble at Pittsburg Landing, where, by 20 March, Sherman had encamped his division in the vicinity of a small country church a few miles out from the landing.¹

The church had been named after an ancient city located west of the Jordan River in the mountains of Palestine. During the time of the Israelites, the city had been the scene of great religious festivals and pilgrimages. The church at Pittsburg Landing also lay west of a large river, the Tennessee, and it, too, would become the destination of pilgrims. But these would be pilgrims of a different sort, for Shiloh Church was to become the final resting place for hundreds of American men.²

Much has been written concerning the dispositions of the units on the battlefield. Because this investigation

¹William T. Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman (New York: D. Appleton, 1875), I, 223-28.

²Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, Dictionary of the Bible, ed. James Hastings (rev. ed.; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), pp. 907-908.

can add little to what has already been determined, the subject is addressed only with regard to whether or not the Union army was in a defensive posture. cursory study of the dispositions revealed that the Union army's positions lay in a large disjointed semicircle, with units only loosely connected and no continuous trace in evidence. The camps appear to have been occupied wherever there was a dry opening suitable for a regimental size unit. The Union perimeter had large gaps between units. In some cases these gaps were as much as one-half to a full mile wide (see Figure 3). Units to the rear were disposed to either side of the main roads, with no suggestion of a second defensive line.³

These dispositions are readily understood if one considers Union intentions. On 20 March, shortly after joining the army in the field and reassuming command, Grant was admonished by Halleck to avoid a general engagement until Buell's army could arrive. Thus reinforced, Halleck intended to direct personally the combined armies of Grant

³David W. Reed, The Battle of Shiloh and the Organizations Engaged (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), pp. 11-12; and Leander Stillwell, The Story of a Common Soldier (2d ed.; New York: Franklin Hudson Publishing Company, 1920), p. 40.

FIGURE 3

SHILOH BATTLEFIELD: SITUATION THROUGH
FIRST DAY, 6 APRIL 1862

Source: Shiloh National Park Commission, "Map of Shiloh Battlefield: Positions on First Day, April 6, 1862," Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War (Washington: Eckert Litho Company, [1900]). (Map furnished as end papers in David W. Reed, The Battle of Shiloh and the Organizations Engaged (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903); Shiloh Battlefield Commission, Ohio at Shiloh, comp. T. J. Lindsey (Cincinnati: C. J. Krehbiel and Company, 1903); and other books.)

MAP OF SHILOH BATTLEFIELD

POSITION - FIRST DAY APRIL 4, 1862
PRESENT BOUNDARY THE BATTLE ON 20

THE SECRETARY OF WAR
BY THE

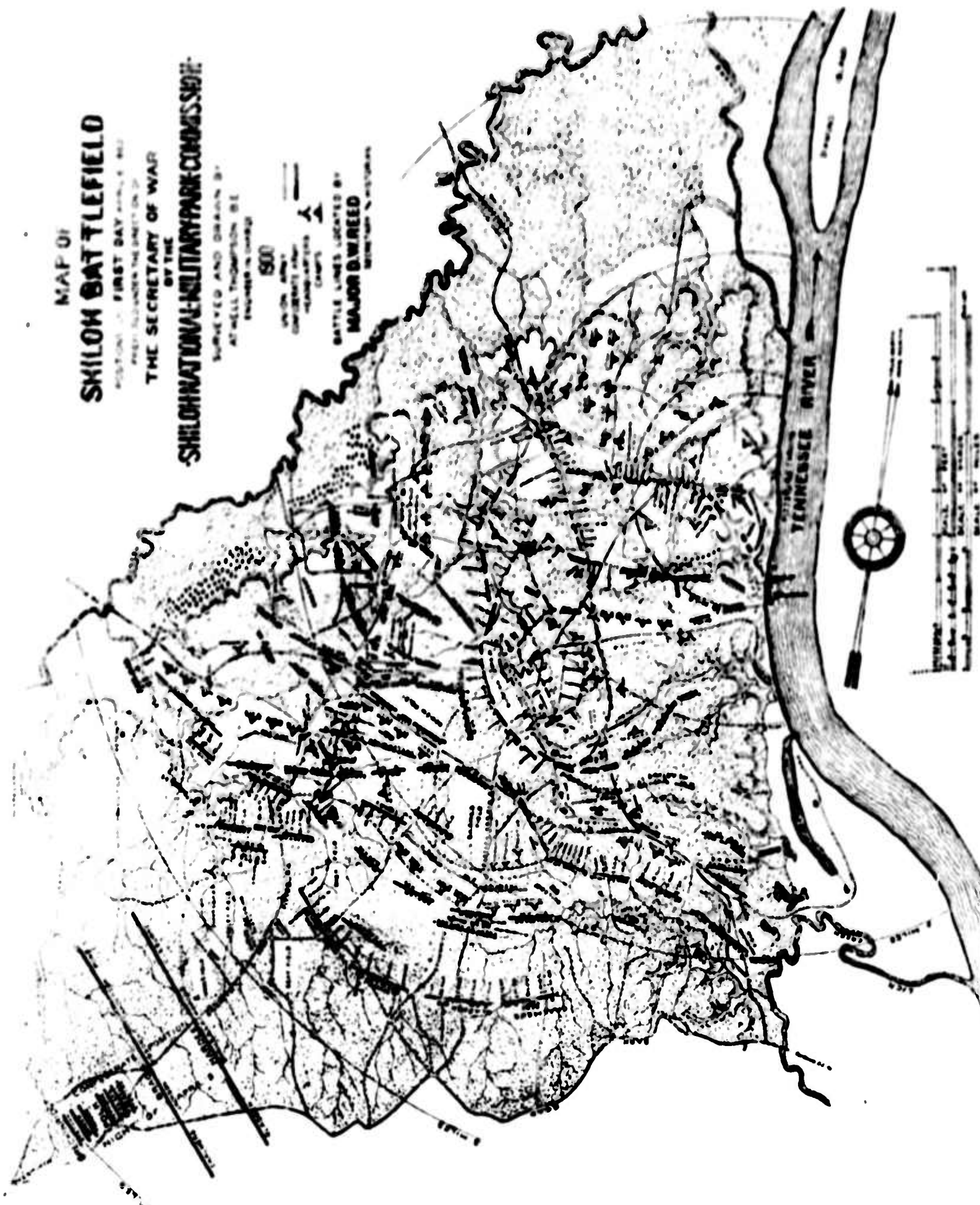
SHILOH NATIONAL MILITARY PARK COMMISSION

SURVEYED AND DRAWN BY
ATWELL THOMPSON, B.E.
ENGINEER IN CHARGE

1500

LEGEND
— CHURCH
— CAMP
— HEADQUARTERS
— CAMP

BATTLE LINES LOCATED BY
MAJOR D. W. REED
MILITARY ENGINEER



and Buell against Corinth, where the Confederate army was known to be concentrating. Grant and his command, in fact, were occupying an assembly area while awaiting the arrival of Buell's army and other reinforcements.⁴

The effect of this situation and the attitude it created are significant. Grant expressed it best in a dispatch to Halleck which stated, in part: "The temper of the rebel troops is such that there is but little doubt but that Corinth will fall much more easily than Donelson did when we do move."⁵ The writings of other Federal participants reflect Grant's confidence. There was little doubt in the Union camp that when Buell arrived the combined forces would readily defeat the southern army at Corinth. It is shown in Chapter VI that the Union high command discounted the possibility that the Confederate army might leave its defenses at Corinth and attack. After the Shiloh battle,

⁴The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], Vol. VII (1882), Vol. VIII (1883), Vol. X, Parts 1 and 2 (1884), and Vol. LI, Part 1 (1897), Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), X, Part 1, 41-42, 45-46, 50-51, 55, 66, 77, & 83.

⁵OR, X, Part 2, 55-56.

Sherman remarked that prior to the battle he "always acted on the supposition that we were an invading army; that our purpose was to move forward in force."⁶

The activities of one of Grant's division commanders also exemplify the prevailing Union attitude. Eight days prior to the battle, General Benjamin M. Prentiss was awaiting the arrival of troops with which to form his new division. He selected a camp area approximately 3 miles out from the landing and almost a mile to the left of Sherman's division. So little was Prentiss' concern for the enemy, he slept overnight in a wooded area at the proposed camp site--alone, unguarded, and attended only by an orderly and a Negro cook.⁷

There was much discussion as to when and where the next battle would take place. One Union soldier recalled hearing an argument in which some soldiers believed the battle would be fought at Corinth, where the enemy was reported to be strongly fortified, and others believed the

⁶Sherman, I, 289.

⁷Alfred T. Andreas, "The 'Ifs and Buts' of Shiloh," Military Essays and Recollections, by Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Illinois Commandery (Chicago: A. C. McClurg and Company, 1891-1907), I, 108.

enemy would withdraw to Memphis and a long march would be required. In his words: "I do not remember to have heard the opinion expressed that the ground we then occupied would be the battle-ground."⁸ Grant shared his soldiers' viewpoint. After the battle he wrote:

The fact is, I regarded the campaign we were engaged in as an offensive one and had no idea that the enemy would leave strong intrenchments to take the initiative when he knew he would be attacked where he was if he remained.⁹

Sir Winston Churchill once made an observation which, although not specifically directed toward the battle of Shiloh, is nonetheless appropriate. He said: "However absorbed a commander may be in the elaboration of his own thoughts, it is sometimes necessary to take the enemy into consideration."¹⁰ Evidently the Union forces at Pittsburg Landing did not "take the enemy into consideration."

Life in the camp was described as not very demanding.

⁸Charles Wright, A Corporal's Story (Philadelphia: James Beale, Printer, 1887), pp. 30-31.

⁹Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, ed. E. B. Long (New York: World Publishing Company, 1952), p. 171.

¹⁰RB 22-1, Leadership (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1 August 1969), p. 3.

The units drilled, held parades daily, and stood inspection on Sundays. Guard duty was light and, despite daily training, the men had adequate time to wander from camp to camp looking for relatives or friends and to write letters, pitch quoits, and read papers. Some men hunted the woods for wild onions and "turkey peas" which were later prepared on improvised mud ovens. Except for occasional rain and bouts with dysentery, life in the camp was very agreeable. Even during the rain the men remained reasonably comfortable in their 12-man Sibley tents. Thus, until at least the third of April, the general atmosphere in the Union camp was one of leisure while patiently awaiting the arrival of new units and Buell's army.¹¹

The lack of preparation was due in part to military inexperience of the officers and men. The date is significant in the sense that Fort Sumter had been fired upon only one year earlier (11 April 1861). Fort Donelson, at that time the largest battle fought in the western theater, had taken place a scant two months earlier. Grant estimated

¹¹Committee of the Regiment, The Story of the Fifty-Fifth Regiment (Clinton, Massachusetts: W. J. Coulter, 1887), p. 70; Stillwell, p. 32; and Wright, p. 30.

that he had no more than 27,000 men available during the siege at Donelson, and the preponderance of these men were newly organized volunteers. During the siege Grant had used close to 9,000 men to secure bases in his district. Of the remaining 18,000 men, very few had actually become involved in the fighting. In short, the war had only just begun and the army, for the most part, was still inexperienced.¹²

Just before the battle of Shiloh Grant had approximately 34,000 men present for duty.¹³ Only about 7,000 of these men had seen action at Fort Donelson. The bulk of these veterans was assigned to General Lew Wallace's division, which was positioned at Crump's Landing, a place some 6 miles north of Pittsburg Landing. These troops did not reach the battle until late on the evening of the first day, 6 April. As Grant pointed out in his memoirs, three of the five divisions engaged on the first day had absolutely no previous combat experience. This occurred because as units arrived at Pittsburg Landing they were sent forward to form

¹²Grant, p. 161; and OR, VII, 649.

¹³There is some disagreement as to the precise number; however, the exact duty strength is not important to this study.

Prentiss' newly organized division. Additional units were also sent forward to Sherman and John A. McClernand since it was anticipated that their divisions would lead the way to Corinth. Unfortunately, as events developed, these three divisions were to bear the full impact of the Confederate attack.¹⁴

Some of these inexperienced units had arrived only the day before the battle. For example, the 18th Regiment of the Wisconsin Volunteers, which had not heard a round fired in anger, arrived on the field the afternoon of 5 April. This regiment was among the first to be attacked on 6 April. Although they had received some training, they were hardly prepared for such a shock. The unit had been equipped with the heavy, awkward, Belgian musket and 40 rounds for each weapon. Although deficient, the 18th Wisconsin's situation was considerably better than that of their neighbor, the 15th Regiment of Michigan. This unit had also arrived on 5 April and had been positioned on the outer edge of the Union camp in Prentiss' division. On the morning of the attack, the men from Michigan suddenly

¹⁴Grant, p. 178; and OR, X, Part 2, 67.

realized they had not been issued a single round of ammunition. They were compelled to withdraw hastily to the rear.¹⁵

Numerous such examples might be cited, though this would add little to the study. It is sufficient to state that several units had first received their arms en route from their state to the field, they had arrived at Pittsburg Landing one or two days before the battle, and the men of the units were hardly schooled enough to load their weapons according to the manual. It is also true that many of these same units found themselves on the front line of the Union army when the Confederates attacked.¹⁶

The officers of these volunteer units were, as Grant stated later, "equally ignorant of their duties."¹⁷ Because these officers had been either appointed or elected to

¹⁵Wisconsin Shiloh Monument Commission, Wisconsin at Shiloh (Madison: Democrat Printing Company, 1909), pp. 56 & 60.

¹⁶Grant, p. 178; and Captain C. P. Searle, "Personal Reminiscences of Shiloh," War Sketches and Incidents, Vol. I (1893) and Vol. II (1898), by Iowa Commandery of the Loyal Legion of the United States (Des Moines: The Kenyon Press, 1893 and 1898), I, 329.

¹⁷Grant, p. 178.

command, it should not be surprising that many were totally unprepared for what lay before them. As one captain of the 15th Iowa later remarked, his colonel was an exceptional lawyer and a man of great character, but as "ignorant of military tactics as any man that ever gave or attempted to secure the execution of a military command."¹⁸

Soldiers complained of having drunkards for commanders and expressed a lack of confidence in their superiors' judgment. After the battle many cases were reported wherein units were formed on poor defensive terrain or were ordered to assume inappropriate formations. On first sighting the enemy, at least three regiments were immediately led from the field by their respective commanders. One such regiment, the 53d Ohio, heard their departing commander cry, "Save yourselves," before the enemy had even been warmly engaged.¹⁹

¹⁸Captain James G. Day, "The Fifteenth Iowa at Shiloh," Iowa Commandery of the Loyal Legion of the United States, II, 174-75.

¹⁹Elijah C. Lawrence, "Stuart's Brigade at Shiloh," Civil War Papers, by Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Massachusetts Commandery (Boston: F. H. Gilson Company, 1900), II, 492; and Shiloh Battlefield Commission, Ohio at Shiloh, comp. T. J. Lindsey (Cincinnati: C. J. Krehbiel and Company, 1903), pp. 23-24.

Another example of the Union officers' inability to follow instructions was demonstrated by the way in which Sherman's orders were implemented by his subordinates. Sherman had directed that the brigades be so disposed in camp that when the regiments formed the brigades would be in line of battle. Further, he specified that the interval between encamped regiments would not exceed 22 paces. As already discussed, the gaps between regiments exceeded these limits. This could have been expected of subordinates who had not even instructed their men to ditch around the tents. To be sure, one soldier of the 61st Illinois reported that on the night after their arrival at Pittsburgh Landing his unit lived in tents for the first time. During that evening a terrible downpour thoroughly drenched the men's blankets and belongings. After the experience they dug a ditch around the tents to trap the runoff. Such was the status of training among the officers and men that bivouacked at Shiloh Church.²⁰

It should not be concluded that the Union army was commanded by cowards and incompetents. Nothing could be

²⁰OR, X, Part 2, 50; and Stillwell.

further from the truth. The majority of the officers behaved with rare courage. It must be remembered that these were the same men who would eventually lead the army of the west at Vicksburg and Chickamauga. The significance is that at the battle of Shiloh these officers were learning a new and terrible trade. They were obliged to pay dearly for errors early in their apprenticeship.

The Union camps were not protected by field fortifications. In the case of the army at Shiloh, fortifications must be thought of in terms of simple entrenchments and improvised obstacles. For the existing Union situation, military authorities of that period and Army regulations of 1861 recommended only minor construction. The Union army was occupying a temporary camp while preparing to resume offensive operations, and major fortifications were not justified. Yet, most assuredly, some work was appropriate.²¹ Although the Union position may have been hastily entrenched, sufficient obstacles could have been created to

²¹ Henry W. Halleck, Military Art and Science (3d ed.; New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1862), pp. 61-87, 327-42, 344-48, & 357-60; and United States War Department, Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1861), pp. 38-49, 489-538, & 634-39.

form a strongly protected line from Lick Creek to Owl Creek, but no such effort was expended. As a matter of fact, the only recorded attempts to fortify occurred after the first day's fighting. A Union battery near Pittsburg Landing was protected by a few sacks of corn and an Illinois battery dug a slight earthwork for its guns.²² More spade and axe work on the part of the Union undoubtedly would have caused serious problems for the Confederate army. During the first day Prentiss' division fell back and occupied positions in a sunken road from which they virtually stopped the Confederate attack while inflicting terrible casualties among the Confederate attackers. The action there causes one to ponder what might have occurred had the Confederates been confronted with entrenchments earlier in the morning.

During the siege of Corinth, which followed the battle at Shiloh, the Union army made extensive use of entrenchments. Once again the prevailing attitude within the Union army at Shiloh is revealed. The operation was viewed as an offensive one, and the time spent in the camp was evidently considered to be a mere pause before

²²John W. Coons (comp.), Indiana at Shiloh (Indianapolis: Indiana Shiloh National Park Commission, 1904), p. 204.

commencing the attack. As late as 20 March Grant directed that the command at Pittsburg Landing be held in readiness to move on a moment's notice. This is yet another indication that in Grant's mind there was no idea the army would remain long at Pittsburg Landing. On 20 March he learned that Buell was in Columbia, Tennessee, only 60 miles from Savannah. It was probably not until 23 March that Grant realized Buell was making slow progress and was unlikely to reach Savannah before another week. Moreover, Grant and the command were unconcerned by any threat of a Confederate attack.²³

One other reason fortifications were not constructed must be attributed to "inexperience." Later in the war the men took it upon themselves to cut down trees for obstacles and protection. They also unhesitatingly put the shovel to work. As one officer reported when discussing Shiloh: "After the sad experiences which soon followed, pick and spade were recognized as valuable implements of warfare."²⁴ However, this was not the case early in the war. A soldier

²³OR, X, Part 2, 50-52 & 58.

²⁴Lawrence, "Stuart's Brigade at Shiloh," p. 490.

from the 15th Iowa Regiment remembered that if an officer had proposed building works prior to the battle of Shiloh he would have been laughed out of camp, for, as the soldier explained, "we wanted a square, stand up, open fight."²⁵

Grant arrived at Savannah on 17 March and established his headquarters there. It is well documented that he generally spent his days at Shiloh and returned to Savannah each evening. During a grand review and inspection of the entire command on 2 April, Grant noted with dismay that some units were still wearing the gray uniforms which had been issued by their states. Based on the evidence that the commander had spent so much time in the camp, one must conclude he was aware that weaknesses existed. It must be surmised that Grant gave so little credence to the possibility of a Confederate attack that he chose to ignore the camp's defensive weaknesses and concentrate on preparing his inexperienced command for the impending attack against Corinth.²⁶ In readying the command for the offensive, Grant

²⁵W. P. L. Muir, "Fifty Rounds To Begin With," History of the 15th Iowa Volunteers, 1861-1865, ed. William Worth Belknap (Keokuk, Iowa: R. B. Ogden and Son, 1887), p. 192.

²⁶Committee of the Regiment, p. 73; Grant, p. 172;

had some inertia to overcome. In a letter to Halleck, he complained that his officers generally provided only feeble support and, despite his best efforts, he found great difficulty in getting his orders disseminated.²⁷ This fact helps to describe further the scope of the problem that faced Grant.

Grant had determined to move his headquarters to Pittsburg Landing by 31 March, but news that Buell and his command would soon be arriving at Savannah altered his decision. Consequently, his headquarters were still at Savannah when the Confederates attacked on 6 April. Moreover, no single individual was placed in overall command at the landing during Grant's absences. This is certainly another indication that an attack on the camp was not anticipated, for, if the threat was deemed critical, Grant would surely have moved his headquarters to Pittsburg Landing.²⁸

On the night of 4 April, while returning from a visit to the outlying camp, Grant received a painful injury.

OR, X, Part 1, 84; and OR, X, Part 2, 88 & 92.

²⁷OR, X, Part 2, 73. ²⁸Grant, p. 172.

In the darkness, the mud left by a heavy downpour apparently caused his horse to stumble and fall on him. The softness of the mud undoubtedly saved Grant from a severe, crippling injury. Nevertheless, his injury was to plague him for the next two days. Thus, Grant was mentally troubled, physically discomforted, and faced with the task of readying a huge, inexperienced army for offensive action. News had reached him that Buell and the lead elements of his army would reach Savannah on the following day. The attack on Corinth surely would begin in a very few days, and time was running short.

On the night of his accident, 4 April, Grant had been a general for 9 months, his army had been at Pittsburg Landing for approximately 19 days, he had been reinstated in command 22 days, and he had been at Savannah 18 days. Although Grant was experiencing extreme difficulties, his opponent was faring little better.

CHAPTER V

JOHNSTON'S DECISION TO ATTACK

General Albert Sidney Johnston graduated eighth in the West Point class of 1826. From that time on his life was one of the most fascinating of any man's in this country's history. Following graduation, he was commissioned a Lieutenant of Infantry and served with the Illinois Volunteers during the "Black Hawk" War against the Sac Indians. Ironically, 29 years later the Illinois Volunteers were opposing him at Shiloh. He resigned in 1834 because of his wife's ill health, but two years later, after his wife passed away, Johnston went to Texas to participate in that state's struggle for independence. Soon after his arrival in Texas, he fought a duel with Sam Houston which very nearly resulted in his not being available to the Confederacy during the Civil War. The circumstances surrounding the duel would convince anyone that Johnston was a courageous man who, if necessary, would accept great risk. He became the commanding general of the Republic of Texas Army and was

later the Republic's Secretary of War. During the war with Mexico he served in the Texas Volunteers and with the regular army. Following that war he retreated to the quiet life of a Texas farm, but debts and political misfortune caused him to seek reappointment in the United States Army in 1849. He re-entered the service as a Major of Cavalry, saw frontier duty in Texas and Utah, and was promoted to brevet brigadier general in 1857. In 1861 he resigned his post as commander of the Department of Pacific to join the Confederate Army.¹

With the fall of Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, the southern cause was in dire straits. Nashville had been occupied and the Confederacy was faced with the prospect of being split by the advancing armies of Grant and Buell. The surrender at Fort Donelson involved the loss of approximately 11,000 troops with associated arms and equipment. The evacuation of Nashville had been conducted in haste and near panic. The Southerners were greatly incensed by these

¹George W. Cullum, Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates of the United States Military Academy (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Riverside Press, 1891), I, 368; and William Preston Johnston, The Life of Albert Sidney Johnston (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1878), pp. 1-291.

disasters and were inclined to place the entire blame on General Johnston. Both the people and the press denounced him vehemently. President Davis was deluged with letters and telegrams demanding that Johnston be relieved.²

President Davis was convinced that Johnston was an able general, and he was also certain that no officer of equal ability could be found to replace him. Accordingly, President Davis ended the matter officially by remarking: "If Sidney Johnston is not a general, the Confederacy has none to give you." Moreover, the President wrote Johnston assuring him of the Government's continued good faith and wishing the command well in its future operations. He further stated that, if necessary, he would visit the command to demonstrate publicly his full support for Johnston.³

General Johnston's and General Grant's situations at that time were strikingly similar. Both men were under a cloud; yet, both evidently enjoyed the confidence of their respective Presidents. Johnston had little choice but to

²Johnston, pp. 511-18.

³Jefferson Davis, The Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1881), II, 38 & 41-48.

assemble the Confederate forces near the rail center at Corinth, where he could dispute any further Union advances. Accordingly, the forces from all over the west began to withdraw to that area--Ruggles from Memphis, Bragg from Mississippi, Polk from Columbus, and Johnston's own force from Murfreesboro, Tennessee. These moves were completed by about 24 March. General Beauregard was named second in command, and the combined army was reorganized into four corps under Generals Hardee, Bragg, Polk, and Breckinridge.⁴

By the time these movements had been completed, Johnston was aware that Grant's army had landed at Pittsburg and that it was rumored Buell was also marching to that place. Johnston realized that even with his combined force of approximately 40,000 men there would be little hope of defending Corinth against both Grant and Buell. He estimated that these two armies together would number some 100,000 strong. His estimate was high, but by not much more than 10,000 troops. After deliberation, Johnston decided to adopt a rather daring plan. Simply stated, he decided to attack Grant's army at Pittsburg Landing, hoping to destroy

⁴ Johnston, pp. 538-43.

it before Buell could reinforce. If successful, he would be able to deal later with Buell's army on more or less equal terms. The opportunity was certainly there. Grant's army was separated from Buell's by the Tennessee River. If Johnston's force could drive between Grant's army and the Tennessee, he would force the enemy away from their supply base at Pittsburg Landing and then position the Confederates so as to preclude the juncture of the remnants of Grant's army with Buell's army.⁵

Johnston's plan was not without risk, however. Again, similarity existed between his and Grant's situations. Only a few Confederate units had been in combat, and that combat had consisted of minor skirmishes. There were many raw troops who had received arms only a week earlier. The Union equipment was generally superior to that of the Confederates, especially with regard to artillery. The officers of Johnston's army were inexperienced, and staff operations left much to be desired. Despite these disadvantages, Johnston proposed to move his relatively large and inexperienced body of troops against a numerically superior enemy,

⁵ Johnston, pp. 548-52.

an enemy who could also call on gunboats for support. The Confederates could only hope the boldness of the attack would so surprise the Union army that these disadvantages would be offset.⁶

On 26 March General Robert E. Lee sent a letter to General Johnston in which he supported the proposed attack on Pittsburg Landing. He cautioned Johnston to act quickly, before Buell and Grant could unite forces. On 2 April, after it had been positively confirmed that Buell was marching to join Grant, Johnston ordered his army to attack. The march to Pittsburg began on 3 April.⁷ (See Figure 4.)

What followed testifies to the difficulties involved when moving or attacking with an inexperienced army. The distance between Corinth and Pittsburg Landing was only 22 miles. However, the roads were narrow and traversed densely wooded country; the troops were unused to marching;

⁶ Johnston, pp. 529-30, 548, 552, 565, & 567.

⁷ Johnston, p. 551; and The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), X, Part 2 (1884), 385. Actually, General Hardee had accurate information 19 March regarding Buell's movements (OR, X, Part 2, 31-32).

FIGURE 4

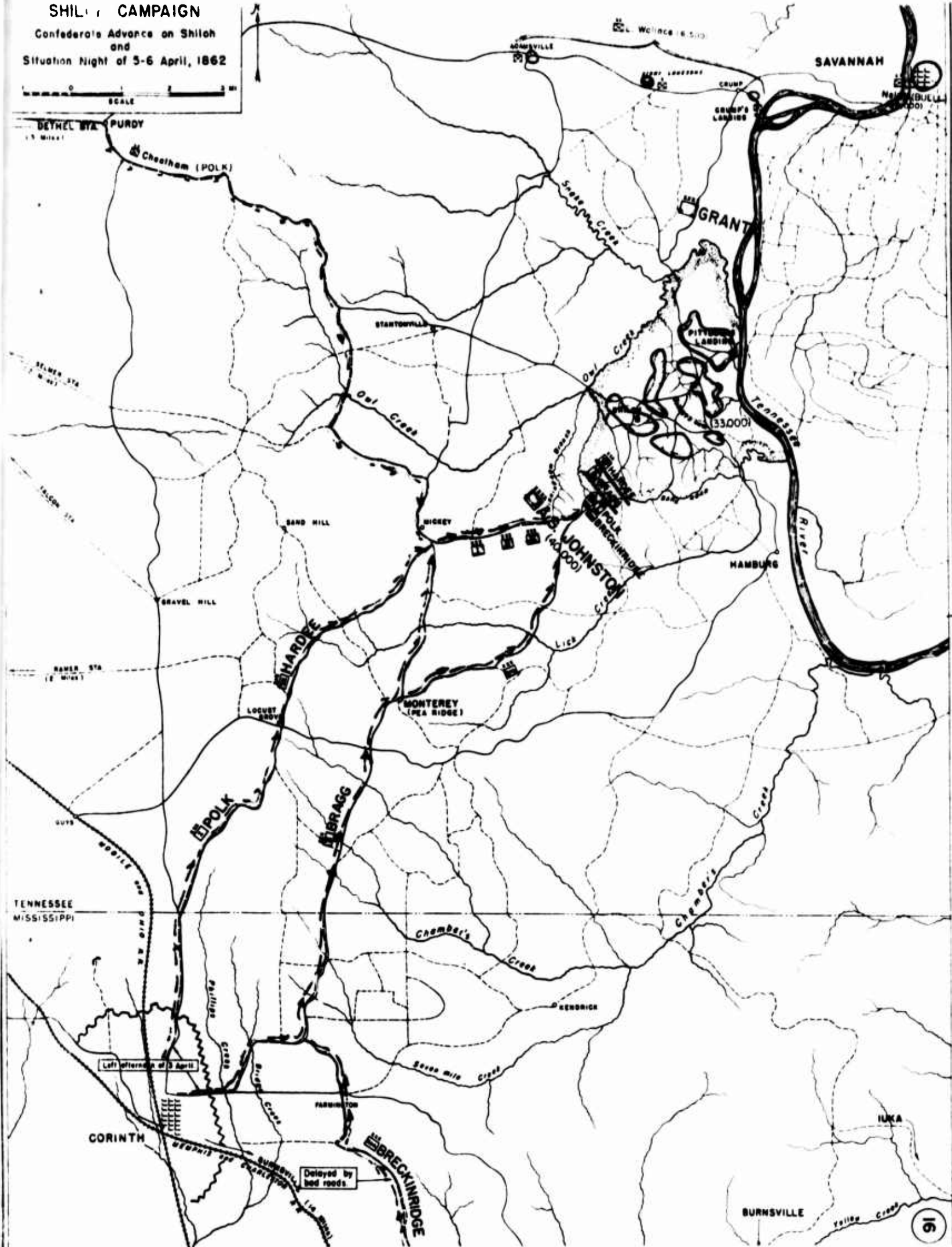
SHILOH CAMPAIGN: CONFEDERATE ADVANCE ON SHILOH

Source: Matthew Forney Steele, Civil War Atlas To Accompany American Campaigns (Washington: Byron S. Adams, 1909), Plate 16.

SHILOH CAMPAIGN

Confederate Advance on Shiloh
and
Situation Night of 5-6 April, 1862

SCALE
0 1 2 3 Miles



and the 4 April rains, cause of Grant's accident, had made the roads all but impassable. Additionally, Confederate units often experienced hopeless entanglements and delays caused by units which entered the wrong march order. The attack was originally planned for 5 April, but the weather and the unexpected delays resulted in a change of plans. By late evening of 5 April the last units were finally placed on line about 2 miles from the Union camp. The attack was scheduled for early Sunday morning, 6 April.⁸

Because of the delays, sharp contacts between the Confederate cavalry and Union pickets, an engagement between Sherman's troops and a brigade from Hardee's division, and the reckless discharging of individual Confederate weapons for the purpose of checking the condition of cartridges after the rain, officers in the Confederate command suggested abandoning the entire enterprise. They expressed the opinion that their chance for surprise had been lost and that the enemy unquestionably would be entrenched and alert by morning. General Johnston decided to venture those hazards. To do otherwise once he had the huge army in

⁸ Johnston, p. 564; and OR, X, Part 1 (1884), 385-86.

motion certainly would have been difficult. Consequently, the Confederates bivouacked in place and awaited the morning of Sunday, 6 April 1862.⁹

⁹Johnston, pp. 566-72.

CHAPTER VI

INTELLIGENCE AVAILABLE TO GRANT'S ARMY

It would be ridiculous to assume that the relatively untrained Confederate army could steal within arm's length of their opponents and not reveal some sign of their presence. From mid-March to the opening of the battle, the Union command gathered considerable information regarding Confederate activity and dispositions.

On 17 March General Sherman reported that all roads to Corinth were covered by enemy cavalry. The Union pickets had been deployed as far out as Lick Creek and Pea Ridge, approximately 4 miles from the camp. He expressed the opinion that any advance beyond there might bring on a general engagement. This he was loathe to risk, in view of General Halleck's orders.¹ On the same day General Grant

¹The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), X, Part 2 (1884), 25.

reported to Halleck that the enemy was strong at Corinth and that General Johnston was there in person. Grant added, "Johnston being there was very much against my expectations."² Grant reported on 19 March that the enemy had shifted some heavy artillery to Corinth and that the enemy knew General Buell was in motion. He also reported that the enemy in Corinth did not exceed 20,000 troops. On the following day Grant's headquarters learned from a Confederate deserter that the troops at Bethal had moved to Corinth. Sherman also reported on the same day that his cavalry had skirmished with enemy cavalry on the road to Corinth. Sherman concluded that the enemy was attempting to ascertain the Union strength at Pittsburg Landing. On 21 March Grant reported that 20 railroad cars loaded with Confederate troops arrived at Corinth and that Paris and Bethal were deserted. On 23 March Buell reported he had information which indicated Johnston was concentrating at Tuscumbia, near Florence, Alabama. Buell also reported that the enemy was moving artillery from Georgia to Tennessee. On 24 March Sherman conducted a strong reconnaissance toward Pea Ridge

²OR, X, Part 2, 42.

and encountered Confederate cavalry.³

Also on 24 March, Buell wrote he had intercepted two enemy letters containing information that Corinth was being reinforced. These letters announced that 25,000 to 40,000 men had already arrived and that the number was expected to reach 80,000 to 100,000 men. Buell added that the battle would obviously be for Corinth and that he would move forward expeditiously. On 29 March Halleck informed Buell the enemy was massing at Corinth. On 30 March 6 southern deserters reported the Confederate strength at Corinth to be about 80,000 men. On 2 April, as a result of a reconnaissance up the Tennessee River, Sherman discovered that all enemy batteries down to and including Eastport had been abandoned. He also set up an ambush on Lick Creek and captured a Confederate from the First Alabama Cavalry. One of the Union cavalry units involved in this action reported on 3 April that the rebels at Monterey had three regiments of infantry, one of cavalry, and a battery of artillery. Moreover, they determined that the enemy cavalry was in

³OR, X, Part 2, 48-61.

force at Lick Creek.⁴

By this time the Federals had acquired a great deal of valuable information. Analysis of this information should have substantiated that Johnston had arrived in Corinth, that the Confederate forces appeared to be withdrawing from surrounding areas and concentrating in significant force at Corinth, and that additional artillery was also being transported to that city. Based on this intelligence, two probable courses of action were open to the Confederates: they were reinforcing and concentrating to launch an attack or they were preparing to defend Corinth. The latter course of action would have seemed the more probable. However, an attack should not have been ruled out since the Confederates were known to be aware that Buell's army was marching to join Grant's and that some 80 miles of road and the Tennessee River still separated the two armies.

The increased number of contacts with the Confederate cavalry should have alerted the Union command since this activity could have indicated the enemy was screening the forward movement of infantry units. The Union cavalry

⁴OR, X, Part 1 (1884), 83; and OR, X, Part 2, 65, 77, & 80.

reports of 3 April regarding the presence of artillery and infantry at Monterey, 10 miles from camp, and large numbers of enemy cavalry in the vicinity of Lick Creek ought to have caused alarm. It was impossible for this investigation to determine precisely whether this force was indeed the lead elements of Johnston's attacking army. Because Johnston had ordered the advance to begin early on 3 April, it seems unlikely any Confederate forces could have reached Monterey that quickly; therefore, the units had probably been there for some time, reinforcing the Confederate cavalry. Nevertheless, their presence should have disturbed Grant's staff. The events of 4 April should have prompted the staff to a desperate search for more information.

Other information that should have alerted the Union command came as a result of an incident on the Union right flank. Late in the afternoon of 4 April overzealous Union pickets in front of Sherman's division wandered forward of their proper positions and were captured by a detachment of Confederate cavalry. A regiment drilling nearby was immediately sent forward in an attempt to retrieve the captured men. It's lead elements were surrounded by enemy cavalry, but the remainder of the regiment, reinforced by Union

cavalry, attacked and drove the Confederates away from the beleaguered force. The Union cavalry pursued the fleeing enemy approximately 2 miles from camp, where they came upon at least two regiments of enemy infantry supported by artillery. The entire Union force regrouped and withdrew in good order. From Confederate reports for the same period it was ascertained that those Confederate regiments belonged to the lead elements of Hardee's corps, the corps which was to lead the attack on Sunday morning. This was the skirmish which prompted some Confederate officers to recommend that Johnston abandon the plan to attack.⁵

Grant was riding toward the front to receive reports of the skirmish when he was intercepted by General W. H. L. Wallace. Wallace reported that all was once again quiet, so Grant turned his horse back toward Pittsburg Landing. Grant was on this return journey when his horse slipped in the mud. It might well be that in the confusion following Grant's injury the serious implications of the skirmish were overlooked. Such a conclusion is mere supposition and particularly difficult to substantiate in light of the

⁵OR, X, Part 1, 89-93.

reports which followed the action.

During the Civil War both armies relied heavily on cavalry to obtain information regarding the enemy. At Shiloh, Grant failed to take full advantage of this valuable resource. Throughout the operation he retained no cavalry directly under his control. Rather, these units were assigned to the various divisions. Prior to 2 April the division commanders had attached their cavalry to the brigades within their divisions. On 2 April Grant directed the division commanders to detach the cavalry from brigades and form a separate cavalry brigade within each division. Thereafter cavalry brigades were to be responsive directly to their respective division commanders. He further directed that the army's cavalry resources be redistributed among the six divisions so as to provide each division with approximately two battalions of cavalry. Unfortunately, to fulfill this requirement, some divisions were compelled to exchange cavalry units. In the case of Sherman and General Stephen A. Hurlbut, the exchange took place on 5 April. As demonstrated in Chapter VII, this proved an inopportune time to lack immediately available cavalry for reconnaissance patrols on Sherman's front. Had Grant suspected a

Confederate attack was imminent, it is doubtful he would have issued such an order. In general the division commanders situated their cavalry to the rear and center of the divisions. From there the cavalry was sent forth on reconnaissance and patrol missions. Although the cavalry was used, events suggest that more extensive cavalry activity was warranted. For example, reconnaissance in force missions by reinforced cavalry units on 4 and 5 April might well have disclosed the true Confederate intentions.⁶

On the morning of 5 April Sherman reported to Grant that all was quiet and that he was in the process of effecting the cavalry exchanges described previously. Later he reported that the enemy was "saucy" but unlikely to press the pickets far. He concluded by saying, "I do not apprehend anything like an attack on our position."⁷ Also on 5 April, Grant reported to Halleck that skirmishing had taken place between the Confederates and Union outguards. He noted that during the incident of 4 April the enemy was apparently in considerable force. He concluded, however, by

⁶OR, X, Part 1, 100-105; and OR, X, Part 2, 87, 92-93, & 152-54.

⁷OR, X, Part 2, 93-94.

saying, "I have scarcely the faintest idea of an attack (general one) being made upon us, but will be prepared should such a thing take place."⁸

What preparatory actions Grant took are obscure. Evidently no general alert was declared within the Union camp and no cavalry was ordered out to develop the Confederate situation. Certain precautions were taken by individual units, but not as a consequence of any central direction. The action Grant did take can hardly be considered precautionary. The lead units of Buell's army arrived in Savannah before noon on 5 April. However, Grant was not at his headquarters when they arrived. About midafternoon he met with General William Nelson and Colonel Jacob Ammen of Buell's army. When informed that the commands were prepared to continue the march to Pittsburg, Grant replied that boats would be made available on Monday or early in the week. He informed the two officers a fight would not occur at Pittsburg but the army could expect a battle when they reached Corinth. Grant concluded the conversation by saying there was no immediate need for Buell's men at Pittsburg Landing.⁹

⁸OR, X, Part 1, 89.

⁹OR, X, Part 1, 330-31.

Buell reported that even on the morning of 6 April, after Grant's departure for the battle, the impression at Grant's headquarters in Savannah was that the firing was only another skirmish. Sherman was even less easily convinced. In his memoirs, he confessed:

About 8 a.m. I saw the glistening bayonets of heavy masses of infantry to our left front in the wood beyond the small stream alluded to, and became satisfied for the first time that the enemy designed a determined attack on our whole camp.¹⁰

All this might have been different had higher commanders been provided the information General Lew Wallace claimed he had on the evening of 4 April. He stated in his memoirs that just after dusk one of his scouts made the startling report that the entire Confederate army, led by General Johnston, had departed from Corinth early that morning and was headed toward Pittsburg Landing. Shortly after the first scout's arrival, a second scout reported the identical information, apparently having obtained his information from a different source.¹¹

¹⁰OR, X, Part 1, 292; and William T. Sherman, Memoirs of General William T. Sherman (New York: D. Appleton, 1875), I, 236.

¹¹Lew Wallace, An Autobiography (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1906), I, 455-56.

If Wallace recollected accurately, and there seems little reason to doubt his veracity, his subsequent actions were inexcusable. He immediately dispatched an officer from his headquarters at Crump's Landing to Pittsburg Landing. The officer was given a sealed message for Grant. If Grant had already departed to Savannah for the night, the officer was to give the envelope to the postmaster at Pittsburg Landing. When the courier arrived, Grant had already left. The envelope was dutifully given to the postmaster, who was told it contained important news of the enemy and must reach Grant without fail. In the meantime, Wallace notified his own brigade commanders to be especially vigilant.¹²

Wallace made no further mention of the incident except to add that he was unable to say whether or not Grant ever received the message. This is yet another example of the experience level among Grant's officers. Wallace should have individually provided each division commander with the information, and on the following day he ought to have assured himself personally that Grant had indeed received this critical message. Wallace was briefed by his scouts on

¹²Wallace, I, 456-58.

the night of 4 April and the Confederate attack did not occur until the morning of 6 April. There was abundant time to prepare a strong defense had the army been made to realize a defense was necessary.

One may readily observe that intelligence information was not lacking. Although there were only indications that an attack was impending, sufficient signs were in evidence to warrant a vigorous Union attempt to ascertain the precise situation. Additionally, actions should have been ordered to alert the camp and improve defenses. In conclusion, the Union forces had sufficient information upon which to conclude that a threat to their position existed. The failure to utilize this intelligence can be ascribed to inexperience at all levels of command and reluctance on the part of the command echelon to reassess the enemy's intentions.

CHAPTER VII

THE BATTLE AT SHILOH CHURCH

In comparison, Union soldiers who occupied advance positions were far more concerned than their commanders by the Confederate activity. Some units to the rear were also troubled. For example, the Twelfth Iowa, which was assigned to General W. H. L. Wallace's division and practically encamped on Pittsburg Landing itself, was especially alert. A major recalled that the sounds from the skirmish at the front on Friday had been heard in the Iowa camp. By that nightfall, details of the incident had been circulated via the usual army grapevine to every private in camp.

During the evening of 4 April and the following day, the Confederate intentions became the subject of many heated discussions. Moreover, after taps on 4 April, extra ammunition and food were distributed among the men, who were cautioned to keep their cartridge boxes and haversacks full and close at hand. On Sunday, shortly after the sounds of battle reached their camp and even before the long roll had

been sounded, nearly all the men had their cartridge boxes on and their weapons in hand. Moments after the long roll, the entire regiment was in place on the parade field.¹

As mentioned previously, General Lew Wallace's division, far to the rear at Crump's Landing, had strong reason to expect an attack. On Sunday morning his division began to assemble as soon as the sounds of battle reached their camps.

A sergeant from the 15th Iowa Infantry aboard a ship bound for Pittsburg Landing remembered later that his boat had passed another which was coming from the direction of the landing. As the ships passed he was informed that a battle was taking place at the landing. This was on 5 April, so undoubtedly the battle referred to was the skirmish of 4 April. The sergeant and his men had yet to experience the horror of war; consequently, he and his companions grumbled over the fact they probably would not arrive in time to take part in the battle. About 4 a.m. the next day the boat arrived at Pittsburg Landing. Soldiers from the 2d Iowa

¹David W. Reed, Campaigns and Battles of the Twelfth Regiment, Iowa Volunteer Infantry (Evanston, Illinois: n.n., 1903), pp. 42-43.

Infantry met the 15th Iowa and volunteered the latest camp rumor that a battle might take place at any time. The rumor proved all too accurate, and within hours the sergeant and his unit were engulfed in the battle at Shiloh!²

It is evident, then, that some foreboding was felt within the rear units prior to the battle. However, the awareness demonstrated by the previously cited units was apparently more the exception than the rule. For example, when the battle began, members of the 81st Ohio Volunteers had just agreed that the sounds they heard to the south were railroad cars in Corinth, when suddenly the distinct sounds of artillery reached their ears. Their commander explained, "Boys, that's not the cars; they're fighting!"³

As might be anticipated, the rear units were not nearly as aware of the impending danger as those units posted farther from the landing. Colonel David Stuart's brigade occupied the extreme left flank of the Union position and was encamped 1-1/2 miles from the landing itself.

²William Worth Belknap (ed.), History of the 15th Iowa Volunteers, 1861-1865 (Keokuk, Iowa: R. B. Ogden and Son, 1887), p. 191.

³Charles Wright, A Corporal's Story (Philadelphia: James Beale Printer, 1887), pp. 32-33.

There was a gap of at least a half mile between the colonel's brigade and the next friendly unit to his right (see Figure 3, page 51). Probably due to the sense of isolation caused by this gap, the brigade became extremely disturbed and more vigilant following the skirmish in front of Sherman's camps on 4 April. Stuart sent out strong reinforcements to his pickets, one of which was a company size force stationed a full mile and a half forward of the camp near Bark Road. On 5 April he had dispatched six companies to the southwest toward Hamburg to reconnoiter near the west bank of the Tennessee. Because the Confederate advance was aimed more or less toward the center of Grant's army, Stuart's reconnaissance efforts were fruitless. When the battle began, however, his brigade was prepared. That they had more time before the Confederates reached them than any other unit on the front should not detract from the fact they were vigilant. It must be concluded that they would have detected the enemy in sufficient time to take up battle positions had they been one of the first units attacked rather than one of the last.⁴

⁴Elijah C. Lawrence, "Stuart's Brigade at Shiloh,"

Although one entire regiment panicked and fled disgracefully from the field, Stuart's brigade generally fought well during the fight in defense of their camps. From the standpoint of time, the brigade was materially assisted by the fact that the enemy force confronting them had been disengaged from another corner of the battlefield and, at the last moment, had marched to a position opposite Stuart's front. As a matter of fact, Stuart's forces opened the battle when they fired on the Confederate units as those units were still forming for the attack. Because the Confederates were delayed, Stuart was not driven from his camps until almost noon. General James R. Chalmers, who commanded the Confederate units, observed that he confronted stubborn enemy resistance after the Union forces had withdrawn beyond the camps and that his units suffered severe losses although after 2 p.m. he was finally able to push the enemy toward

Civil War Papers, by Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, Massachusetts Commandery (Boston: F. H. Gilson Company, 1900), II, 489-91; and The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies [hereinafter cited as OR], Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), X, Part 1 (1884), 257.

Pittsburg Landing. Based on these reports, it would be erroneous to conclude that the Union's left flank units were surprised. It may be said they were poorly disposed and without fortifications, but they were not taken unawares.⁵

The situation in Prentiss' division was without doubt the most fascinating of the entire command. Prentiss held what can be described as the center of the Union line (see Figure 3, page 51). Facing toward Corinth, his positions were slightly in advance of Sherman's and approximately a half mile to the right of General Stuart's brigade. During the onset of the battle, this gap actually increased to almost a mile. The activities of the enemy on 4 April caused Prentiss to dispatch reconnoitering parties to his front. Those parties reported the presence of enemy cavalry and pickets in the woods beyond the camp. As a consequence of the reports, the Union pickets were doubled. On Saturday evening, 5 April, General Prentiss reviewed his division on a field in front of the camp. A Major James E. Powell, who had not participated in the review, reported that while

⁵Committee of the Regiment, The Story of the Fifty-Fifth Regiment (Clinton, Massachusetts: W. J. Coulter, 1887), pp. 89-104; and OR, X, Part 1, 257-59 & 547-51.

riding in the woods he thought he had seen enemy horsemen just beyond the picket line. He was given two companies to reconnoiter the area. Upon his return he reported enemy cavalry in great strength about a mile from the camp. This information was promptly relayed to Prentiss, who immediately ordered another company out as an advance picket. That company commander, about 8:30 p.m., sent Prentiss a message expressing the opinion the enemy was massed just to his front! Prentiss' reaction supports the hypothesis that the Union command echelon suffered psychological blindness to the possibility the enemy might be attacking. Moreover, Halleck's order not to bring on a general engagement was being adhered to beyond all justification. Prentiss presumed that the enemy force was merely another reconr issance element and that to leave the company out on advance picket would only invite trouble. Accordingly, he directed that the unit be withdrawn to camp!⁶

Colonel Everett Peabody, whose regiment was encamped

⁶William A. Neal (ed. and comp.), History of the Missouri Engineer and the 25th Infantry Regiments (Chicago: Donahue and Henneberry, 1889), pp. 124-26; and John Robertson (comp.), Michigan in the War (Lansing: W. S. George and Company, State Printers, 1882), p. 325.

in a forward position in Prentiss' camp, had seen and heard enough to become greatly disturbed. He spent an uneasy night, unable to sleep. Finally, about midnight he decided to act. On his own authority he directed Major Powell to advance toward Seay Field with some three companies from the brigade. At approximately 5 a.m. this force encountered the pickets of Hardee's corps in Farley Field, about a mile and a half forward of the Union camp. The battle at Shiloh began.⁷

Major Powell was immediately reinforced by pickets, but, as the firing became general, they gradually fell back until Colonel David Moore, 21st Missouri Regiment, came forward to assist them. By this time Prentiss' entire division was drawn up for battle. According to both Confederate and Union reports, Prentiss' camps were not taken until around 8:30 a.m., a full three and one-half hours after the initial enemy contact. The Confederate accounts also describe heavy losses incurred as successive charges were repelled by Union fire. Although the Union camps were

⁷ Neal, pp. 124-32; OR, X, Part 1, 277-78, 280, 282, 284-85, & 602; David W. Reed, The Battle of Shiloh and the Organizations Engaged (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), p. 13; and Robertson, p. 325.

finally taken, they were not taken without a fierce struggle. Moreover, as General Hardee later reported, the Union army actually started the battle when Prentiss' troops attacked the Confederate lead elements. For these reasons it must be concluded that the members of Prentiss' division were not caught by surprise.⁸

The last division actually on line early that morning belonged to General Sherman. His division was encamped to the right of and slightly to the rear of Prentiss' camps (see Figure 3, page 51). Although their commander remained skeptical, the men of this division were apprehensive that the Confederates were about to launch an attack. The activities of 4 April had unnerved the men and they were deeply concerned. This wariness of the enemy's intention probably resulted from the average soldier's combat inexperience. The sporadic clashes with enemy patrols had sufficed to keep these soldiers uneasy and vigilant. However, it is doubtful that any of these men had anticipated the large size of the impending Confederate attack.

On 5 April Sherman ordered that a road be cut from

⁸OR, X, Part 1, 277-78 & 566-69.

the church forward to an old cotton field three-fourths of a mile east of the camp. The road was to be used during the anticipated march to Corinth. This directive is another indication of the command's continued adherence to offensive planning while disregarding the possibility of an enemy attack. During the afternoon several officers of the division decided to visit the area where the road was being constructed. The party had advanced only a short distance when it came upon members of the work detail who reported that a large enemy force occupied the far side of the cotton field. The officers rode up to the Union picket line, which was situated on the near side of the cotton field, and observed a large body of Confederate cavalry in the far wood line. The Union officers concluded those units had been ordered to dispute the advance of Union reconnaissance elements.

Upon returning to camp the officers notified Sherman of their observations and then prepared their units for a possible Confederate advance. Sherman considered a Confederate attack incredulous, but he did send three additional companies to the picket line. Meanwhile, in the divisional camp, the men of at least two regiments were instructed to

stack arms in front of their tents and be prepared to assemble on short order. Early the following morning an officer returned from the picket line to report that Confederates had been seen preparing to advance across the cotton field and fighting had broken out in the area of Prentiss' pickets. By the time the officer completed his report, the firing had become rapid to the left front of the division.

The unit sent out by Peabody, of Prentiss' division, actually made first contact with the enemy to the left front of Sherman's division. In truth, that reconnaissance served Sherman as well as Prentiss. Although Sherman was still unsure of the enemy's purpose, he did immediately form his division for battle. At approximately 7 a.m. the enemy arrived in front of Sherman's camp and the Union soldiers began receiving fire. About 8 a.m. Sherman saw the enemy massed for the first time as they advanced toward his camp. The fighting became furious, and about 10 a.m. Sherman was pushed from his camp. As in Prentiss' case, and for almost the same reasons, it can be safely stated that Sherman's division was not surprised.⁹

⁹Wills De Hass, "The Battle of Shiloh," Annals of

There is no evidence to substantiate the hypothesis that the Union camps were attacked without warning. In each case investigated the pickets proved vigilant and prompt in reporting the enemy's presence. All units were provided adequate time to deploy. The execution of orders and the positions chosen for defense may be subject to criticism, but early warning was not a problem. Although there were cases in which units were called from breakfast to form for battle, the argument that men were slaughtered in their tents, while half asleep, is unfounded. It may have been possible for someone to sleep through the battle for the camps, but all participants described it as a fierce struggle which could be heard all the way to Savannah. To sleep through such clamor a man would have had to be more than just exhausted.

Several reports written after the battle mention that bodies were found in tents following the battle. These men may have been killed in their tents during the initial Confederate onslaught. However, it is far more likely these

the War, by Philadelphia Weekly Times (Philadelphia: The Times Publishing Company, 1879), pp. 679-80; and OR, X, Part 1, 248-54, 262-70, 444, 496-97, & 580-82.

individuals died as a consequence of illness or wounds received in battle. Undoubtedly, during the Confederate attack some men remained in their tents because of illness. At the first signs of danger, one would imagine they attempted to make their way to the rear. Yet, it must be conceded that some individuals might have been too ill to move and consequently perished. Additionally, these camps were the scene of a major conflict on the morning of 6 April. Some wounded may well have been placed in the tents and then forgotten during the retreat. On the night of 6 April there was a downpour. Doubtless other wounded from the battle sought shelter in the tents, where they either died from their wounds or were killed during the Federal advance through the camps on 7 April.

The remainder of the battle is of little importance to the investigation except where it substantiates those matters already discussed: the inexperience and lack of training common to both armies, the lack of Union preparations to defend their camp, and the weak command and control systems within both armies. After the loss of the camps, the Union army's operations might best be described as a series of delaying actions. Some limited counterattacks

were made, but none was able to reverse substantially the early impetus gained by the Confederate attack. Because of the initial gaps in the Union lines and the broken nature of the terrain, the Union army was occupied throughout the day in plugging holes and reinforcing or denying open flanks. Each time these tasks were successfully accomplished, the Confederate force streamed through yet another hole and the entire process had to be repeated. Thus, from the smallest unit up to and including division, the Union army's flanks were turned from one position to the next. Each time, amid some confusion, the Union forces were compelled to yield ground doggedly. Meanwhile, the rear units were hurriedly sent forward in a piecemeal effort to stabilize the defense. (See Figure 3, page 51.)

These events demonstrate that the Federal Army was unprepared and poorly disposed to conduct a defensive action, for, had proper planning taken place, one would expect to find the reserve forces had been committed in one major counterattack to restore forward defensive lines. A counterattack of this magnitude would have required detailed advance planning and proper disposition of the reserve units prior to the Confederate attack. There is no evidence of

such preparation.

Due to the nature of the conflict, units soon found themselves fighting isolated battles. The fighting was often at close quarters and always savage, which caused shockingly high losses, particularly among the officers. From the onset of the fighting Union stragglers became an incredible problem as, literally, thousands of frightened, green troops moved rearward to Pittsburg Landing. Because there was no place for these men to go except to the landing, the scene there soon became chaotic. Thousands of noncombatants, wounded, and stragglers milled around in complete disorder. For all these reasons unit integrity was lost rather early in the battle. Federal officers directed whatever groups of men they could gather and many soldiers spent the day fighting under the regimental colors of states other than their own. Commanders were able finally to effect only the bulk movement of masses of men over short distances in an attempt to intercept each successive Confederate charge.

Grant himself arrived at Pittsburg Landing at mid-morning and immediately visited his division commanders, but there was little he could do to influence the action. He

had no organized reserve except Lew Wallace's men at Crump's Landing, and a series of misunderstandings caused that unit to arrive on the field late in the evening.

Grant's only significant instructions were given to General Prentiss, who was told to hold his position at all costs. Prentiss' division, along with General W. H. L. Wallace's, was then holding what can be considered the center of the Union line. They had placed their men along a sunken road which ran along a slight elevation and was deep enough to provide good protection to a man lying prone. (See Figure 3, page 51.) For the soldiers occupying it, the road became a natural, although shallow, trench. An open field some 500 yards wide extended to the front of part of the road, and the remainder of the road ran through heavy undergrowth and timber. To approach the road, the enemy had to advance over a cleared field or through heavy underbrush. Because the Union line followed the road, there was a slight angle in the line which pointed in the direction of the advancing Confederates. The events along the road, especially at the angle, are best summarized in the name given the area by Confederate soldiers--"Hornet's Nest." By about 10 a.m. Generals Prentiss and W. H. L. Wallace had disposed

some 3,000 men and supporting artillery along the length of the road. These troops destroyed entire Confederate units as one attack after another was beaten back with great slaughter. Finally, about 5:30 p.m., when both flanks of Grant's army had been driven back to Pittsburg Landing, the Union positions in the "Hornet's Nest" became exposed and unsupported. Confederates closed around the open flanks and surrounded the entire position. At one place along this front they massed 62 pieces of artillery. Faced with certain destruction after more than 6 hours of determined resistance, General Prentiss and 2,200 Union soldiers ended the battle at "Hornet's Nest" by surrendering to the Confederate army.¹⁰

The battle at "Hornet's Nest" bought General Grant invaluable time during which he established a final perimeter around Pittsburg Landing, massed all available artillery, and stationed two gunboats in position to support the final defense. Grant was prepared, but the Confederates were not. The Confederate soldiers were exhausted from

¹⁰William Preston Johnston, The Life of Albert Sidney Johnston (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1878), p. 620; and OR, X, Part 1, 278-79 & 472.

their advance, which had begun in early morning. Most of the men had slept poorly the night before, and there had been little time to eat since the battle began. Losses in both casualties and stragglers had been high, for the southern army, too, was made up of raw recruits. Whole units had ceased to exist when the army passed through the Federal camps, and looting had become uncontrollable and widespread. During the day thousands of frightened men straggled back toward Corinth or disappeared from the field. Moreover, as the army advanced, the attacking lines had a tendency to meld into one, particularly in the area of the "Hornet's Nest," where the whole army seemed to gather. When this area was encircled, the greater part of the Confederate army had joined together in a confused mass. Thus, the Confederates were able to muster only one weak assault on Grant's final position. This attack was quickly spent, and as night fell the resources of the Confederate army were exhausted. Some Confederates in the final assault reportedly had no ammunition.¹¹

General Johnston's plan was to drive his enemy from

¹¹OR, X, Part 1, 387, 408-409, 423, 425, 465-67, 550-51, 555, 569-70, & 572-74.

Pittsburg Landing, but the plan did not work. Early in the afternoon Johnston realized the attack was actually forcing the Union army toward the landing. From there Grant could continue to supply his army and Buell's army would still be able to reinforce. Johnston personally undertook to correct this situation. However, about 4:30 p.m., while leading an assault to turn the Union's left flank from the landing, he was struck by a Minie-ball. The ball tore open an artery in the general's right leg, but no one thought to apply a tourniquet and Johnston died within 10 to 15 minutes. His death not only had an immediate and adverse effect on the morale of the Confederate army, but it also served to encourage the Union soldiers, all of whom had heard of the incident by nightfall. The precise implications of this loss at a critical time in the battle is difficult to measure, but it must be concluded that the Confederate cause was hurt by the untimely death of this fine commander.¹²

By nightfall the Confederate army had fallen back to the abandoned Federal camps, General Lew Wallace had arrived

¹²Ulysses S. Grant, Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, ed. E. B. Long (New York: World Publishing Company, 1952), Johnston, pp. 613-15; and OR, X, Part 1, 569.

at Pittsburg Landing with his division from Crump's Landing, and General Buell's army had begun to arrive in strength. In the morning Grant attacked with the combined resources of almost two armies. The Confederate forces proved unable to withstand the unequal odds, and after bitter fighting the Union army once again held the camps where the battle had begun the day before. A beaten, disorganized Confederate army slowly made its way back to Corinth as the dazed Union army watched the retreat but made no real attempt to pursue. So ended one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War.

A young Union soldier of the 81st Ohio might well have been speaking for General Grant and the entire Union army when he looked up from his supper that night and, with a deep sigh, said, "Well, I'm here yet!"¹³

¹³Wright, p. 46.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Other than to gain knowledge for its own sake, the ultimate purpose for any historical event is to benefit from the experiences of others. That was the objective of this study. The lessons learned at Shiloh were dearly bought, and the knowledge gained should not go unheeded.

Some may argue that tactics and equipment have changed so drastically since the American Civil War that lessons learned in 1862 have little application in modern times. On the contrary, one factor is common to both eras, for then, just as now, wars were fought by people and people make mistakes. Although not discussed in the study, striking similarities exist in the Battle of the Bulge, the Chinese attack across the Yalu River, and the battle at Shiloh Church. When all facts have been divulged, the North Vietnamese 1968 TET offensive might very well be added to the list.

Because these other battles took place long after

the battle at Shiloh Church, it must be surmised that the lessons learned in 1862 were forgotten during the intervening years. If so, the goal of this investigation, to examine the battle for those experiences which might prove invaluable to future commanders, is justified. To attain this aim, two major tasks were accomplished. First, it was necessary to determine as precisely as possible the degree of surprise achieved by the Confederate army. Having accomplished that task, it was then possible to ascertain what concourse of circumstances and errors made surprise possible.

The investigation disclosed that prior to the battle there was a feeling of foreboding within the Union camp, units along the camp's perimeter being particularly wary. This apprehension caused some Federal units to seize the initiative without direction by their senior commanders and discover the Confederate attack in time to alert the camp. In fact, it might be said that on the morning of 6 April 1862 the Union force actually made the first attack of the battle at Shiloh. The conclusion is unavoidable that the units below division were not caught by surprise. Their picket lines and the reconnaissance elements provided them sufficient warning to form for battle. The fierce struggle

in the front of the Union camps further attests to the fact that these units were not caught unawares. It cannot be said, however, that the Union soldiers had prior knowledge of the full scope of the attack. They were aware that the Confederates were close at hand and they knew that some action would soon take place. Few, if any, anticipated the Confederates would launch a full scale attack.

Surprise within the Union command echelon was complete. Sherman confessed he did not believe a full scale attack was in progress until he actually saw the advancing enemy. Grant's message of 5 April confirms he had not the slightest concern regarding a Confederate assault on the camp. No other evidence would lead one to believe the command suspected an attack was imminent. For example, Buell's forces were not hurried forward to Pittsburg Landing and no general alert was ordered within the Union camp. The Federal command simply did not consider an attack by the Confederates to be a credible threat. This was exemplified by continued adherence to their own attack plans in the face of mounting intelligence that the Confederates themselves might be preparing an attack. It must be concluded that the Confederate attack took Grant and his command echelon

completely by surprise.

The nine principles of war provide a convenient basis for discussing the circumstances and errors which made surprise possible. In particular, one finds the following principles violated by either the Union or the Confederates: unity of command, objective, offensive, maneuver, and security.

The lack of unity within the western command planted the first seed of the battle of Shiloh. Whether Lincoln had or had not designated one overall commander, it was incumbent upon both Generals Halleck and Buell to work in concert. Had these two officers cooperated in developing a mutually acceptable strategy for the western theater, it is unlikely that the battle would have taken place at Shiloh. The two Union armies could have acted together and operated within mutually supporting distance. Had such cooperation occurred following the fall of Fort Donelson, Johnston's army would have been hard pressed to escape from Nashville to Corinth. Further, it is unlikely the Confederates could have successfully massed at Corinth before being defeated in detail by the combined armies of Halleck and Buell. What lessons does this aspect of the battle offer? When two or

more forces are operating against a common foe, the forces are obliged to exchange information and act in harmony against their enemy. Commanders must put aside petty differences or selfish aspirations in favor of an attitude of mutual trust and cooperation. Failure in these endeavors subjects the combined armies to defeat in detail and threatens their common cause with ruination.

The treatment Grant received at Halleck's hand was inexcusable. A subordinate must be led to believe he enjoys the confidence and loyalty of his superior. Where this is impossible, the superior would be well advised to replace the subordinate with someone for whom he does hold such trust. To what extent Grant's troubles with Halleck affected the battle will probably remain unfathomable, yet it is reasonable to conclude that in some measure Grant was influenced by this unhappy experience. The importance of command unity was clearly demonstrated during the Shiloh campaign.

The principles of the objective and the offensive are very closely related where this particular battle is concerned. Following the occupation of Nashville, Halleck exhibited indecisiveness regarding the precise objective of

the Union army's next undertaking. Grant had been relieved and General Smith had been sent south with rather ambiguous instructions. Time was vital. The southern cause was reeling after the critical losses of Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Nashville. This was the time to press home the advantage before Johnston could regroup his forces. Had a common strategy been agreed upon in advance, the Federal armies could have maintained the momentum and exploited their success. Such was not the case. Johnston was conceded valuable time he opportunely used to reconstitute his army and seize the initiative. For a time the southern army was even able to change the momentum in their own favor. Victory at Shiloh might well have fallen to the Confederate army--certainly a rare prize for an opponent who only a short time earlier stood on the precipice of defeat. This illustrates the importance of the offensive in warfare. A victorious army must maintain the momentum and never allow its opponent a respite in which to reorganize. To do otherwise is to nullify all previous gains and to accept the possibility that the enemy himself might attack.

According to the principle of maneuver the commander is obliged to deploy his forces so as to place the enemy at

a relative disadvantage. Grant violated this principle and in so doing presented his enemy the opportunity to strike a decisive blow. The selection of Pittsburg Landing as the assembly area was not improper, given the assumption the army would remain there only a short time. However, the landing had two very important weaknesses. First, the Tennessee River represented a major obstacle behind the army and, second, this obstacle separated Grant's and Buell's armies.

With regard to the first weakness, the army, if defeated, could be pinned against the river and totally destroyed. In short, while an obstacle of this kind can be useful in protecting a flank, in defeat it can become the instrument of disaster. The prudent commander will always assure himself of at least one unobstructed line of withdrawal along which his army may delay should fortune turn against him.

The second weakness was serious in that Grant's position at the landing presented the Confederates the opportunity of using the river to keep Grant and Buell separated. Johnston, while avoiding the combined strength of the two, might thus have destroyed each army individually.

To preclude a similar situation, two forces which confront a common enemy must avoid placing themselves astride an obstacle. If such a disposition is impracticable, a feasible plan must be provided for rapid concentration of both forces on either side of the obstacle. The longer Grant remained at the landing, the more his army was endangered and the more apprehensive he should have become. After it had been ascertained that Buell's arrival on the west side of the Tennessee River would be delayed, maximum effort should have been directed toward improving the defenses within the camp. Such precautions would have diminished the danger to Grant while he awaited Buell.

The Union army all but ignored the principle of security. Grant and his staff were in error when they decided not to fortify the camp's perimeter. Such construction and a realignment of forces could have materially strengthened the camp's defenses. Faced with a more formidable position, Johnston might have hesitated to attack and Shiloh could well have been relegated in history to an assembly area from which the Federal armies marched upon Corinth. As the investigation revealed, General Grant was undoubtedly aware that his camp's defenses were weak; yet,

no particular effort was expended to rectify this condition. It is obvious the general devoted the entire energies of his command toward attacking Corinth. If he was aware this involved a risk to the command, he must have considered it marginal. As a result, the outer perimeter of the Union camp was ill-defined, the camp was unfortified, the terrain was not used to best advantage, the headquarters was situated far from the main body, newly formed units occupied the forward positions, and a general so discounted the Confederate threat that he unhesitatingly bivouacked alone some distance in front of the nearest friendly troops.

One further security violation was necessary to make surprise possible--the misinterpretation of available intelligence. The greatest mistake General Grant committed at Shiloh can be attributed to his overconfidence. Grant assumed after Fort Donelson that the Confederates were beaten and that only one more battle lay between him and total victory in the western theater. From the outset he discounted any possibility of a Confederate attack. Once one accepts this premise, many other things are explicable.¹

¹Bruce Catton, This Hallowed Ground (New York:

The conviction within the Federal command echelon that the Confederates would remain behind the Corinth defenses became so strong that it biased the interpretation of incoming intelligence. The information the Union possessed might have indicated either a Confederate defense at Corinth or a Confederate attack on Grant's camp. The prevailing attitude of overconfidence led Union generals to interpret the intelligence as reinforcing the hypothesis that indeed the Confederates would defend. Even as the intelligence that a Confederate attack might be developing was received, the suggested hypothesis was not reassessed. Until just before the Confederate attack, when the indications of an attack were the strongest, the Federal command echelon remained totally preoccupied with its own plans for attack. For example, the day before the battle the command ordered further construction of roads toward Corinth, roads which the attacking Confederates were to use the following morning. The essence of the problem is that the command had a

Pocket Books, Inc., 1960), p. 131; and The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, Series I, 53 vols., Prepared under direction of the Secretary of War pursuant to Act of Congress approved 16 June 1880 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1880-1904), X, Part 2 (1884), 55.

preconceived notion which contradictory evidence could neither change nor modify.

General Lew Wallace was so concerned with offensive plans that he was hesitant to inform the command of significant indications of an impending Confederate attack.

Informed by his scouts that the Confederates were marching in force toward Pittsburg Landing, he should have personally insured that this information was relayed to Grant and all division commanders. Each and every commander is duty-bound to share information about the enemy with superior and adjacent headquarters alike, even though the information may deviate from current assessments of enemy intentions and capabilities.

The salient point here is that the Union command discounted an enemy capability, one that could jeopardize its own plans. A commander must review each of the enemy's options and select the enemy's most probable course of action based on current intelligence. Having done so, he must review continuously the enemy's options in the light of each new item of intelligence. During this process he must be especially careful not to allow his earlier assessment to influence unduly the selection of the enemy's most current

probable course of action. If he does not remain painstakingly impartial while reaching his decision, he may tend to bend or stretch the most recent intelligence to make it conform to his earlier assessment. As demonstrated at Shiloh, such a practice can have severe consequences.

Because the remaining conclusions do not fall within the principles of war, they are addressed under the broad category of leadership. Supervision is an important element of command. Grant could have strengthened his position through more supervision by his senior commanders and, if necessary, by himself. Grant complained that his officers were as inexperienced as the raw recruits they led. When confronted with a situation of this sort, a commander should exercise greater personal supervision until he is satisfied that the major points he wishes emphasized are thoroughly understood and that his chain of command is operating effectively. The fact that General Grant's headquarters was not located with his troops severely restricted the supervision both he and his staff could exert over the army. Furthermore, as Grant had designated no officer as commander during his absence from the landing, it must be concluded that unity of effort was impeded. The place for the commander is

with his troops. This is all the more true when those troops are inexperienced. Grant's physical discomfort was probably not a major factor in this regard. Records indicate he was not unduly hampered by his injury. Although he complained he was unable to ride, it would be mere conjecture to presume the Confederate attack would have been detected sooner had he not been injured. Although the injury came at an unfortunate time, it apparently had little effect upon the course of the battle itself.

Grant himself was also inexperienced at Shiloh. The highest rank he held prior to the war was captain and at the time the battle was fought he had been a general a scant 9 months. Like his army, the commander was learning. As Grant himself complained, command channels within the army were as yet undeveloped. Because of this problem, his instructions were disseminated and executed too slowly. The army did not possess the finesse it was to display later.

The Confederate experience at Shiloh serves to underscore the hazards of attacking with a poorly trained or inexperienced army. Although Confederate soldiers fought bravely, control was difficult and unit identity was finally lost. Commanders must bear in mind that movements of short

distances with inexperienced officers and men become a formidable task. To attack with such an army is even more difficult. A commander who finds himself in circumstances similar to those faced by General Johnston must ponder these factors before taking the offensive.

The inexperience of both armies and the particularly savage nature of the fighting were probably responsible for the widespread straggling on the battlefield. Both armies had taken inadequate measures to cope with this problem. The stragglers at Shiloh generally became courageous, effective soldiers once they regained their composure. Commanders in future battles must plan for the possibility of widespread straggling in the early stages of a war, especially if nuclear weapons are employed. Advance planning should provide also for the expeditious return of stragglers to their commanders.

These aspects of the battle are mentioned to emphasize the fact that whenever the United States Army has been rapidly expanded to meet an emergency, a preceding period of adjustment has been required before it became a truly efficient fighting force. Armies are not created overnight, and the problems that confronted Grant and Johnston at Shiloh

were only slightly different from those faced by General MacArthur in the early days of the Korean War. One might logically expect essentially the same problems in future wars.

Confederate leadership characteristics also affected developments at Shiloh. Although Johnston adopted a bold plan, he appears to have been indecisive in its execution. General Lee had cautioned him that the attack must be launched as soon as practicable. Although further study is required to ascertain if the attack was, in fact, ordered as soon as it might have been, cursory investigation indicated Johnston could have reached his decision earlier and could have launched the attack sooner. The Confederacy was unsuccessful in achieving its objectives of the first day. On the other hand, Buell was able to reinforce Grant, thereby sealing the doom of the Confederate hopes for victory. Almost more than the Federal army, time was General Johnston's greatest enemy. When a commander embarks on a bold plan, he must act decisively and quickly. When he has adopted such a plan, he has demonstrated a willingness to accept the risk involved. This decision must be all but irrevocable. He dare not hesitate, for success is dependent

on vigorous execution.

Another aspect of Johnston's leadership failings concerns his active participation in combat. The fate of an army depends importantly upon its commander. The death or injury to that man is felt down to the lowest private of the ranks and may well determine the outcome of a battle. The death of General Johnston during the battle was very probably as great a disaster to the Confederacy as any losses suffered during the first day. This involves the age-old question regarding the advisability of the commander's personally leading an attack. Undoubtedly the commander may in this manner influence dramatically the actions of his command. His presence at a point where the attack is faltering or the defense is wavering can exert a critical effect. The tide of battle has been turned innumerable times in precisely this manner. Before resorting to such action, however, the commander must weigh carefully the effect his loss would have on his army. Only at a critical time in the battle would he be compelled to make such a decision, and this, coincidentally, is the most undesirable time for the army to lose his services. The advantages offered must be great before a commander is justified in

placing himself in such extreme danger. The exact impact of General Johnston's loss may be debated, but it must be conceded that his death came at a crucial time for the Confederacy.

The investigation has set forth the valuable experiences gained many years ago by two commanders who fought one another at a place called Shiloh Church. Moreover, the study has served to clarify the events surrounding that controversial battle. Hopefully, the mistakes discussed will never be repeated. If not, and if this investigation is in any way responsible, the objective of the study will have been achieved.

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